Understanding Work-Family Conflict among Male Academics: A Study in Higher Education Management

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Abstract

This study explores the complexities of work-family conflict among male academics, a topic traditionally examined with a focus on women. Drawing from established literature on inter-role conflict, gender roles, and societal expectations, the research challenges conventional assumptions by investigating how male academics manage dual responsibilities in higher education. Employing qualitative methods, the study involved in-depth interviews with 20 senior male academics and managers in public sector universities in Punjab Province. Thematic analysis revealed several themes, highlighting the significant impact of work demands on family life. The findings identify common challenges such as dual employment pressures, childcare responsibilities, and the tension of balancing professional expectations with family duties. Contrary to popular belief, the experiences of work-family conflict were found to be similar across genders, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies and support mechanisms within academia. This study offers nuanced insights into gender dynamics and underscores the universality of work-family challenges in academic settings.

Key Words: Higher Education, Male Academics, Work-Family Conflict

Introduction

The evolution of gender roles within contemporary households reflects a significant shift towards shared responsibilities in managing domestic duties. In dual-career households, where both husband and wife pursue professional careers, the traditional division of labor has become increasingly obsolete. This transformation necessitates a collaborative approach between men and women to effectively balance work and family responsibilities. Central to this dynamic is the shared management of household tasks, encompassing childcare, daily chores, and other familial obligations. Such shared responsibilities are crucial not only for equitable distribution of labor but also for maintaining familial harmony and supporting individual career pursuits.

Despite advancements in gender equity within domestic spheres, the pursuit of a balanced work-life integration remains a formidable challenge. Men, in particular, face the dual pressures of professional success and active participation in household management. The necessity to reconcile these responsibilities often results in heightened stress and fatigue, as they navigate the demands of both familial and occupational roles. This juxtaposition underlines the complexities inherent in modern family dynamics, where the intersection of traditional and evolving gender roles necessitates innovative strategies to promote sustainable work-life harmony.

This study explores the nuanced impact of shared domestic responsibilities on men's work-life balance. By examining the challenges encountered and strategies employed by men in balancing professional commitments with household duties, this research aims to provide insights into fostering supportive environments that facilitate equitable distribution of responsibilities and promote holistic well-being. Understanding these dynamics is essential for advancing inclusive workplace policies

and societal norms that acknowledge and accommodate the evolving roles of men in contemporary family structures.

Literature Review

Historically and in recent years, substantial research has examined the interplay between work and family life, highlighting the dual responsibilities that often hinder women's career progression (Kossek et al., 2010). This scholarly focus is grounded in an extensive body of literature that underscores the significant impact of balancing work and life on career opportunities for women, thereby forming the foundation of work-family conflict (Currie et al., 2002; Guillaume & Pochic, 2009). Work-family conflict, a well-documented phenomenon, is defined as a form of inter-role conflict where the demands from work and family domains are mutually incompatible, creating a situation where engagement in one role makes it challenging to fulfill the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The exploration of this conflict has revealed critical insights into how competing demands can constrain women's professional advancement, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting their access to career-enhancing opportunities.

Research by Miller (2006) emphasizes that the disproportionate burden of household and caregiving responsibilities placed on women exacerbates their work-family conflict. These dual responsibilities often necessitate sacrifices in career development, as women may be compelled to opt for part-time work, career breaks, or lower-paying positions that offer more flexibility but less opportunity for advancement. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle where women are underrepresented in senior and leadership positions, further entrenching gender disparities in the workplace. Further, Kossek et al. (2010) explore organizational practices and policies aimed at mitigating work-family conflict. They argue that supportive workplace environments, including flexible work arrangements, on-site childcare, and family-friendly policies, can significantly alleviate the pressures of balancing work and family life. Such measures are not only beneficial for individual employees but also for organizations, as they can enhance job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and improve overall productivity.

The literature also highlights the evolving nature of work-family conflict in the context of changing societal norms and family structures. Guillaume & Pochic (2009) point out that as more women enter the workforce and pursue ambitious careers, the traditional division of labor within households is being increasingly questioned. This shift necessitates a reevaluation of gender roles and the implementation of policies that promote shared domestic responsibilities. The comprehensive examination of work-family conflict within scholarly research reveals its profound impact on women's career trajectories. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes organizational support, policy interventions, and a societal shift towards more equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities. By acknowledging and addressing the inter-role conflict inherent in balancing work and family life, it is possible to create a more inclusive and supportive environment that fosters gender equality in the workplace.

In contemporary organizational behavior studies (Poelmans et al., 2005), the concept of 'role salience' (Noor, 2002), along with family and organizational factors, gender role expectations, and societal norms, is well-recognized as contributing to

work-family conflict (Buddhapriya, 2009). The theory posits that the importance individuals place on their work and family roles significantly influences the degree of conflict experienced between these domains. Velgach et al. (2006) and Buddhapriya (2009) further elucidate that traditional gender roles and societal expectations are strong predictors of work-family conflict. Numerous studies have explored the intricate relationship between traditional gender roles, dual responsibilities, and work-family conflict, emphasizing the adverse consequences for individuals. For instance, Shoaib et al. (2009), Aycan (2005), Frone, Russell, & Cooper (1992), Duxbury & Higgins (2005), Noor (2002), and Karimi (2008) have all demonstrated how entrenched gender norms and the pressure to fulfill both work and family roles contribute to significant stress and conflict. This conflict not only affects individual well-being but also has profound organizational repercussions, as documented by Allen et al. (2000), Shoaib et al. (2009), Koekemoer & Mostert (2006), Hammer et al. (2003), Kim & Ling (2001), Skitmore & Ahmad (2003), and Haar (2004). Runte and Mills (2004) argued that women particularly "have to pay the toll for crossing the boundary between work and family," underscoring the unique challenges women face in balancing these roles. High work demands, as Bakker & Geurts (2004) point out, can negatively impact family life, predicting an increase in work-family conflict (Korabik & Lero, 2004; Korabik et al., 2009). The incompatibility between work and family domains frequently results in stress for women (Allen et al., 2000), leading to fatigue and health problems (Mostert, 2008).

Research by Cinnamon (2006) highlights that excessive work demands generally have a more detrimental impact on family life than on work life, causing exhaustion and overtiredness, which contribute to work-family conflict (Bakker & Geurts, 2004). This dynamic creates an unpleasant home atmosphere, as further discussed by Perry-Jenkins et al. (2000) and White et al. (2003). These findings collectively emphasize the need for organizations to recognize and address the complexities of work-family conflict through supportive policies and practices that promote a healthier balance between professional and personal responsibilities.

Contrary to public perception and many media accounts, research indicates that women and men report similar levels of work-family conflicts, both in terms of work interfering with family and family interfering with work. This finding is supported by an extensive meta-analysis conducted by the American Psychological Association, which reviewed over 350 studies conducted over three decades and involved over 250,000 participants globally. Kristen Shockley, PhD, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Georgia and the lead researcher of the study, stated, "We essentially found very little evidence of differences between women and men as far as the level of work-family conflict they report. This is quite contrary to the common public perception" (Shockley et al., 2017). This comprehensive analysis challenges the widely held belief that work-family conflict is predominantly a women's issue, highlighting that men experience comparable levels of conflict. The results suggest that both genders face significant challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, thus calling for inclusive workplace policies and support systems that address the needs of all employees, irrespective of gender. By acknowledging the shared nature of work-family conflict, organizations can better tailor their interventions to support both men and women in achieving a healthier work-life balance.

Livingston and Judge (2008) examined the impact of work-family conflict on emotions and the moderating influence of gender role orientation. Using a multilevel design, the study revealed that conflicts where family responsibilities interfere with work were positively associated with feelings of guilt. Furthermore, gender role orientation interacted with both work-interfering-with-family and family-interfering-with-work conflicts to predict guilt. Specifically, traditional men exhibited a more pronounced correlation between family-interfering-with-work conflict and guilt compared to egalitarian men and women of either gender role orientation, indicating a significant interaction at a higher level. Emslie and Hunt (2009) propose that gender continues to shape how individuals manage their domestic and professional lives. Their study highlights that women described ongoing challenges in balancing multiple roles, even in the absence of young children at home, whereas men tended to recount similar conflicts as historical experiences from when their children were young. Despite these gendered narratives, the research also identified diversity within both men's and women's accounts, as well as some shared experiences across genders. Leineweber et al. (2013) found that work-family conflict (WFC) was linked to heightened emotional exhaustion among both genders. They concluded that although women tend to experience work-family conflict slightly more frequently than men, both men and women suffer negative health impacts as a result of this phenomenon. These findings underscore the pervasive nature of work-family conflict and its detrimental effects on emotional well-being, irrespective of gender.

Collectively, these studies illustrate the complexity of work-family conflict and its emotional repercussions. Livingston and Judge (2008) provide insight into how traditional gender roles exacerbate feelings of guilt, particularly for men when family obligations interfere with work. Emslie and Hunt (2009) shed light on the ongoing gendered struggles in balancing work and domestic roles, while Leineweber et al. (2013) emphasize the universal impact of work-family conflict on emotional exhaustion across genders. These diverse perspectives highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of work-family conflict that accounts for gender role orientations, historical and ongoing gendered experiences, and the widespread emotional toll on both men and women.

Shockley et al. (2017) noted that while men and women may encounter similar levels of work-family conflict, their perceptions of these conflicts can differ significantly. Women, influenced by traditional societal expectations where mothers are often seen as primary caretakers, may experience heightened feelings of guilt when work obligations interfere with family responsibilities. This heightened guilt stems from societal norms and internalized expectations that prioritize women's roles as caregivers, leading to a more pronounced emotional response when they feel they are not meeting these expectations. However, Shockley et al. (2017) also identified a gap in the research addressing this specific issue, as there were insufficient studies available to include in their meta-analysis. This indicates a need for further exploration into how societal norms and gender role expectations influence the emotional experiences of work-family conflict, particularly among women. Such research could provide deeper insights into the nuanced ways that work-family conflict affects individuals and inform the development of more targeted support strategies.

The discrepancy between the levels of work-family conflict experienced and the perceptions of these conflicts, Shockley et al. (2017) underscore the importance of considering the psychological and societal factors that shape individuals' experiences of work-family balance. Addressing these factors in future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of work-family conflict and help in designing interventions that mitigate its emotional impact on both men and women.

Material and Methods

Sample and Population

A convenience sampling method was employed to select a diverse group of participants from three public sector universities in Punjab Province: two in Rawalpindi and one in Lahore. The study included 20 men working as registrars, professors, and deans. These participants were selected based on their positions in cadre/BPS 20 and above and included married individuals with children, representing various university management departments.

Data Collection

Qualitative research techniques were employed, with a primary focus on in-depth semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights. The semi-structured format provided a flexible framework, enabling the researchers to guide the conversation while allowing participants the freedom to express their thoughts and elaborate on their responses. This method facilitated the discovery of nuanced details and rich, context-specific information that might not emerge through more rigid, structured interviewing techniques. By engaging senior male academics and managers in open-ended discussions, the research was able to uncover complex and multifaceted aspects of work-family conflict, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between professional and personal responsibilities in the context of higher education.

Interviews

All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted face-to-face as well as via WhatsApp video calls. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews, which typically lasted around 50 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted with one senior participant to explore specific topics in greater depth.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a qualitative research approach, was utilized to identify and analyze emerging themes and patterns from the collected data. This iterative process involved continuously revisiting the data to develop cohesive themes that accurately represented participants' perspectives and experiences.

Results And Discussion

The qualitative interviews have revealed several noteworthy themes. These themes summarized the experiences conveyed by male participants during the interviews, shedding light on crucial facets of the study.

Modern Gender Roles and Work-Life Balance Challenges for Men

Men Participants described during the interviews that modern gender roles are evolving, requiring shared responsibility in managing domestic spheres amid contemporary complexities. In households where both husband and wife are employed, dividing domestic duties becomes challenging, significantly impacting women's ability to focus solely on these tasks. Consequently, managing household chores, childcare, and daily responsibilities necessitates collaboration between men and women. Both genders, therefore, find themselves with limited time for rest and relaxation. The struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance is pronounced as individuals juggle professional roles alongside family obligations. For men, this means actively participating in household management and childcare while balancing career commitments. This dual role often leads to increased stress and fatigue as they strive to meet both familial expectations and professional demands, highlighting the complexity of modern family dynamics where traditional gender roles are increasingly challenged.

The Impact of Transportation Duties on Men's Work-Life Balance

Men Participants shared that the responsibility of transporting their spouse to work and children to daycare or school significantly drain their energy and time. This task depletes physical resources and requires meticulous planning and coordination with work schedules. Prioritizing a spouse's commute often results in men arriving late to their own workplaces, contributing to heightened stress and mental tension. The clash between work and personal obligations intensifies as men strive to manage both roles, creating a distinct form of work-life conflict where personal responsibilities intersect with professional commitments. Balancing these demands evokes frustration, fatigue, and a sense of inadequacy. The mental strain impact job performance and overall well-being, underscoring the necessity for supportive workplace policies that accommodate the dual responsibilities faced by men.

The Impact Family of Health and Professional Responsibilities on Men's Work-Life Integration

Men Participants highlighted that managing family health issues, including taking family members to medical appointments, represents a significant responsibility that contributes to work-family conflict for them. This task involves scheduling appointments and ensuring family members receive necessary care, which requires time away from work. Balancing healthcare responsibilities with professional duties adds complexity to work-life integration. Attending to family health matters can disrupt work schedules, causing them to miss meetings and deadlines, leading to stress and pressure. Additionally, the emotional strain of managing family health concerns

impacts well-being. The dual demands of caregiving and professional roles create conflict as men manage the tension between family needs and career advancement.

The Impact of Collecting Groceries on Men's Work-Home Balance

Men Participants shared that collecting groceries on the way home from work is a practical yet time-consuming task that adds to their daily responsibilities. This chore, after a full day of work, contributes to physical tiredness and fatigue for them. As a result, they often arrive home later than expected, disrupting family routines and leading to late dinners. This delay creates tension between work and home responsibilities, exacerbating work-home conflict as they struggle to balance household needs with professional obligations. The pressure to manage both efficiently leads to stress and frustration. The cumulative impact on well-being is significant, with physical exhaustion from combined work and household duties affecting overall health.

Difficulties Balancing Senior Work Responsibilities with Social Commitments

Men Participants explained that social activities, both with family and within organizational settings, demand considerable time and commitment from them. These activities are crucial for bonding with family and fostering professional relationships but place additional constraints on them managing senior work responsibilities. As men in senior positions often face expectations to participate in social engagements intertwined with their professional roles, such as networking dinners and family functions outside regular working hours. Balancing these commitments with responsibilities like strategic planning and decision-making becomes challenging. The time devoted to social activities detracts from hours available for critical work tasks, leading to increased stress and pressure.

The Impact of Academic Workload, Family Responsibilities and Pressure of Publications on Men

Participants noted that the overwhelming workload due to demands from Deans and Heads of Departments (HoDs), along with publication pressures, significantly contributes to work-family conflict for men in academic settings. Senior academic positions involve managing numerous responsibilities, including departmental operations, administrative tasks, and publication expectations. The pressure to excel professionally results in extended work hours and heightened stress. This workload often spills into personal time, reducing opportunities for family engagement or domestic responsibilities. Achieving publication targets requires extensive research, writing, and publishing efforts, consuming time and energy that could be devoted to family. Men managing these dual challenges experience fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and dissatisfaction with work-life balance.

The Impact of Affordability on Work-Home Conflict

Men Participants expressed that the inability to afford two separate cars for both spouses due to inflation creates significant stress and exacerbates work-home conflict. This financial constraint restricts their mobility and adds logistical challenges, especially in dual-career households. The inability to afford separate vehicles leads to complex scheduling and compromises in managing personal and professional

commitments. Reliance on public transportation or coordinating drop-offs and pickups is time-consuming and disruptive to work schedules. Managing these transportation challenges heightens stress levels, as they manage tight timelines and juggle multiple roles. This situation impacts work and home life, with financial barriers limiting flexibility and autonomy.

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of gender roles in contemporary households highlights the imperative of shared responsibilities in managing domestic duties. In dual-career settings, where both husband and wife pursue professional endeavors, the traditional division of work has given way to a more collaborative approach. This necessitates men's active participation in household management and childcare alongside their career commitments. However, this dual responsibility often leads to heightened stress and fatigue as men strive to balance familial expectations with professional demands.

The challenges explored in this study highlight the intricate interplay between personal and professional realms, emphasizing the need for supportive workplace policies. Issues such as transportation duties, healthcare responsibilities, household tasks like grocery shopping, and balancing senior work roles with social commitments all contribute to the complexity of men's work-life balance. These challenges not only affect individual well-being but also impact job performance and relationships both at home and in the workplace.

Addressing these complexities requires comprehensive strategies that recognize the diverse roles men play within their families and workplaces. Supportive workplace environments that offer flexible scheduling, childcare support, and acknowledgment of caregiving responsibilities are essential. Moreover, promoting a culture that values work-life balance and gender equity can mitigate the stressors associated with managing dual roles.

As societal norms continue to evolve, it is crucial to foster environments where both men and women can thrive professionally and personally. By advocating for inclusive policies and practices that accommodate diverse family dynamics, organizations can create a more supportive and productive work environment for all employees.

Recommendations

These recommendations aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment where men can effectively balance their personal and professional responsibilities, ultimately fostering healthier and more productive workplaces. Therefore, there is need to:

- Implement flexible work schedules that accommodate men's responsibilities in managing household duties and childcare.

- Develop wellness programs that address the physical and mental health needs of men managing dual roles. Programs could include stress management

workshops, access to counseling services, and initiatives promoting healthy lifestyle choices.

- Offer training programs that enhance skills in time management, prioritization, and stress reduction techniques tailored to men managing complex work-life dynamics. This can empower men to better manage their responsibilities effectively.

- Advocate for policies at a national and organizational level that support work-life balance for all employees, regardless of gender.

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