

## **Investigating Work-Life Balance among Female Academics**

***Rabia Naseem<sup>1</sup>, Rafia Faiz<sup>2</sup>, Humaira Asad<sup>3</sup>***

*PhD Scholar: IBA, Department University of the Punjab Lahore*

*Assistant Professor; IBA, Department University of the Punjab Lahore*

*Assistant Professor; IBA, Department University of the Punjab Lahore*

*Corresponding Author's Email: [Rabianaseem0@gmail.com](mailto:Rabianaseem0@gmail.com)*

### **ABSTRACT**

Work-life balance in the context of this study refers to the allocation of the right proportion of time to the various demands of the personal and professional lives, leading towards the equilibrium in life. One of the huge changes noted in the conventional society of Pakistan is the increased female labour force participation in the labour market. Along with the traditional role of the homemaker, women have now assumed the role of the earning member of the family as well. This additional role of the breadwinner puts an incredible strain on the women to balance their work and family responsibilities. This study endeavours to investigate how factors related to work and family domains impact the work-life balance of female academics. This study is established on the qualitative paradigm garnering responses from the 18 female academics employed in the universities in Lahore, Pakistan through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data. Narratives reveal four major themes: Work-life balance experiences, Family and faculty life challenges, Social support and Work-life balance strategies. The findings of the study have important managerial implications for employers, policymakers, working women, their families in Pakistan and other societies with similar contexts.

**Keywords:** *Work-Life Balance, Qualitative Study, Female Academics, Homemaker, Pakistan*

### **Introduction**

Work and family form the two radical dominions of an individual's life and their interface has remained the area of study for researchers throughout the world. Researches emphasized the requirement to balance, enrich, harmonize, complement and integrate family and job demands (Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Caproni, 2004; Lewis & Cooper, 1999; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; McMillan, Morris, & Atchley, 2011; Bulger, Matthews, & Hoffman, 2007; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Investigations in the field of the work-life interface have gained drastic momentum in the previous decades (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007; Chang, McDonald, & Burton, 2010). Several factors such as growing number of career-driven couples expanded entrance of the females into the formal jobs, single parents, ever-changing work demands and

a generous development in the social desirability about men's involvement in gender-typed household chores (Sturges & Guest, 2004; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997) provide an impetus to expanded research in the locale of work-life balance. There is a dearth of the researches from the developing economies that encompass women as a sample causing the marginalization of females in the mainstream work-life interface literature. For working women, it has become a daunting task to manage work and family responsibilities as compared to men because usually women got a large share of unpaid domestic work (Bird, 2006). This recommends that this field of work-life balance research should be diversified and amplified in divergent cultural contexts (Haar, Sune, Russo, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2019; Syed, 2015; Chandra,

2012; Sadaf & Naz, 2017). In a conventional society like Pakistan, where the traditional role of women as a nurturer and caregiver is implanted significantly in the social programming of its members; the work-life balance turns into a challenge for women and their concerned employers (Faiz, 2015). Female labour force participation has increased to 24% in 2019 which is a higher percentage as compared to the previous years (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This female employment trend has prompted an expanding engagement from the academics and practitioners to investigate work-life balance, markedly of women in the higher education sector that are being considered as a female-friendly sector, which women usually opt under the familial and sociocultural domination.

The main research question of this investigation is: How work and family-related factors impact the work-life balance of Pakistani female academics? What challenges do they face due to work-life imbalance? And what coping strategies do they utilize for work-life balance attainment? The paper is arranged in three sections. The first section takes a gander at the literature on work-life balance as a women's issue. Later section investigates the female employment in Pakistan and work-life affairs of 18 female participants caught through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The final section ventilates the emerging themes from the narratives in the light of the literature on work-life balance and concludes how female academics in Pakistan manage their lives.

#### **Work-Life Balance as a women's issue**

Work-life balance has been conceptualized as a person's tendency to retain a clear demarcation and allocation of right proportion of time to the various demands

of the personal and professional lives, consequently leading towards the equilibrium in life (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007), satisfaction and ideal working at work and home with the least role conflict (Clark, 2000), and a productive, salubrious and gainful life that homogenizes love, play, and work, harmonize a wide array of life pursuits encompassing personal and spiritual advancement and communicates an individual's peculiar yearning, amusements, and values (Joplin, Shaffer, Francesco, & Lau, 2003). Conventionally, the work-life interface has been positioned as a conflicting model anchored in dismissive outcomes taking the configuration of stress and burnout (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Lourel, Ford, Edey Gamassou, Guéguen & Hartmann, 2009; Chen, Powell, & Greenhaus, 2009; Grzywacz, Carlson, Kacmar, & Wayne, 2007). Social support is considered as a crucial factor that positively impacts the work-life balance (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2004). The substantial support outside the work domain can be extended by employees' parents, kin, children, spouse, distant family, colleagues, head of the department and friends and can be called as social support (Marcinkus, Whelan-Berry, & Gordon, 2007). Multiple inquiries have shown a positive link between social support and work-life balance. The particular noteworthy help is from the life partner who contributes in various locales of work and non-work area including financial support (Kate, 1998), career support (Darcy, McCarthy, Hill, & Grady, 2012), family management and personal support (Abendroth, & Den, 2011). Family support (Voydanoff, 2002) additionally incorporates the trading of help among relatives.

Emotional and instrumental support are the classifications of personal social support (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). Emotional support is the expressions of the positive emotions that augment an individual's behaviour or affect and thus assisting in maintaining work-life balance. Hence, it is related to the pronouncement of affective behaviour to supplement an individual's function in the work domain. Instrumental support alludes to attitudes and behaviours of the family members planned for helping everyday family member's enterprises, for example, reducing the scope of the home responsibilities of the family member so that he or she can allocate more time to the work. This culminates in the preservation of energy that would otherwise be depleted and hence influencing the individual's job positively (Guest, 2002; Russo, Shteigman, & Carmeli, 2016). The workplace support extended by supervisors and colleagues is another basic module of work-life balance (Abendroth & Den, 2011). Workplace support in the form of organizational support includes work-life balance policies containing compressed weeks, flexi-time, telecommuting, reduced working hours, daycare re centres, job security, part-time working schedule, job crafting, job sharing, maternal leaves and improved working conditions (Lyness & Kropf, 2005; Lobel, & Kossek, 1996; Hayman, 2009; Kelliher, Richardson, & Boiarintseva, 2019; Erden & Bayazit, 2019; Chung, 2019). These arrangements are considered to be cardinal in integrating and facilitating work and life roles.

While a significant part of the literature review exhibited above is impartial towards gender (Tambunan, 2009; Rafia, 2015, Syed, Ali, &

Winstanley, 2005; Syed, Pio, & Ali, 2013; Chandra, 2012; Hassan, Dollard, & Winefield, 2010; Rehman, & Roomi, 2012) towards gender but in higher education, it is a matter of concern for female academics. Literature located that the majority of the previously mentioned factors about work-life interface in this research paper enormously affect women at work. Family structures and female employment differ crosswise over different countries, and still, women are the essential provider for household and childcare duties (Dale & Ahmed, 2011; Imam, Rahim, & Raza, 2018; Rehman & Roomi, 2012). The enormous ingress of women into the workforce and their career-oriented outlook has culminated in expanded researches regarding work-life balance issues. Conventional structures of the developing countries like Pakistan are not proactive in broadening the scope of the help extended to the women to keep harmony between caretaker and breadwinner role. Traditional societies have an ancient mould that has limited the women's role outside the home (Rust & Arribas, 2018). If she revolts not to play her assigned role (homemaker), she is reprimanded by everyone in the society even from the other women. Pakistan's social norms ardently support the gender roles expected from men and women. Studies conducting in an academic sector demonstrated that women feel empowered but familial obligations of women refrain her active participation in the labour market (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016; Noor, 2011; Bell, Rajendran, & Theiler, 2012; Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012). Due to this reiteration of the conventional gender roles within Pakistani society women are less powerful and do not have a seamless authority to make decisions about their

own lives (Mahmood, 2002). Numerous barricades hinder the women's career trajectory and progression mainly because of women's symbolization as a care provider, religious fallacies, being married not only to the man but to his whole family, pronounced practice to give preference to a baby boy, shortcomings of social structures and amenities, non-inclusive policies in the workplace and rudimentary professional training.

The tint of these factors can be observed in higher education institutions, a few researchers have proposed that women purposefully seek after such occupations that are seen as less testing, to adjust it all—to be an effective working woman and a mother. Hakim (2006) proposes this is an adaptive way of life whereby women aspire to allocate proportionate time to home and job. The dogma that women choose a less gruelling job as a channel to fabricate balance is a clear announcement of the sociocultural impression on the career planning of a female. Females equip themselves with decisions that suit their families and prefer decreased working hours to address non-work commitments. Female academics recognize huge outstanding tasks at hand and long work hours as obstacles to discovering balance. Additionally, women are held back in their careers due to substantial affective obligations (i.e., child-rearing or elders' care) irrespective of the sector in which they are employed. Generally, a misconception exists that the malleable nature of the academic job, work-life balance is simpler or increasingly reachable. Contrary to this, the 'marketization' 'commodification' and the 'McDonaldization' of higher education have made the demands and nature of this job challenging (Alawaad, 2015; Hagen,

2002). This connotes that university academics are needed to be responsive towards an external environment by actively disseminating the information and knowledge to society. Multifaceted workplace roles to be played in university by female academics alongside fulfilling the gender norms put forward by the conventional society of Pakistan make work-life balance a challenge for female academics. Although gender roles are evolving and men are also taking part in home chores but due to social conditioning women harbours anxiety and guilt for not being a full-time mother or housewife causing work-life imbalances. Under this discourse, there emerges a necessity to analyze the experiences of the work-life balance of Pakistani female academics in more prominent profundity.

***Female employment in Pakistan's education sector and the work-life balance***--From the economist approach, the labour market is not gendered specific. It is a place where buyers and sellers meet for the exchange of commodities and services. But labour markets do not operate in isolation. It is one of the social institutions shaped by social norms, folks and power disparities (Browne & Misra, 2003). Men and women have divergent resources related to capital, labour, and social capital and own distinctive set of skills and expertise. Formal and informal conventions operating in the society are reflected in the operation of labour markets (DeLeire & Levy, 2001). Women have access to or are considered suitable for particular kinds of occupations. Compensation and promotion systems are codified in the organizations but still are prone to discrimination based on their gender. Women are more bound by the socially ascribed statuses. The relationship

between employer and employee is not gendered inscriptive but it also follows the gender stereotypes developed by the society (Atalianis & Litosseliti, 2017). Boss can usually be a male and work is segregated into “male’s work” and “female’s work”. Such stereotypes are not dependent on the individual’s own choice but are embedded in the social systems. Seeing the other side of the picture, the constitution of Pakistan yields equal employment opportunities for both men and women but women are kept within bounds of few professions. In practice, certain professions see higher convergences of female workers, particularly in teaching and medication-related occupations. The role of females has been changed a lot for the last fifty years in developed and developing countries (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Despite the surge in women’s employment, the employment-to-population ratio of females is one fourth lower than males that are 24.1 percent (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019) and are lagging behind the value of 37.6 percent for South Asia. As for the sectoral share of employment in the category of education, (World Economic Forum, 2013), statistics are silent about the percentage of females employed in higher education institutions but the dearth and underrepresentation of female academics are confirmed by multiple studies (Rab, 2010; Morley & Crossouard, 2016; Fazal, Naz, Khan, & Pedder, 2019). Altogether, 174 universities are providing their services in both the public and private sectors of education. Their number has increased since 1947 when there were only two public sector universities and zero private sector university. Hence, it has led to an increased workforce. Enhanced

number of employees tend to generate personal and work-related problems and affect organizational performance negatively (Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012). Consequently, to provide a work-life balance to employees has become a challenge for contemporary organizations. About Pakistan, many research studies are carried out on work-life balance but few are concerned with the academic sector which is woefully under-examined contended that women are not usually prominent and organized in the labour market. Therefore, mostly they are not successful in gaining the attention of the researchers but now the scenario is changing due to the increased participation of females in the labour force. But still, problems for women are embedded in the social structures and processes (Syed & Pio, 2010) in attaining realistic or fallacious work-life balance (Cramer, Alexander-Floyd, & Means, 2019). Relatives, family, colleagues and societal pressure are involved in affecting the work and family life of women (Trzebiatowski, & del Carmen Triana, 2018). Apart from them, there are other problems like transportation, safety, and place for prayer makes the job harder for them (Zaman, 1997; Ross, 2008). Most of the time, women do not get unconditional support for making a career because of the unwillingness of male family members and socio-cultural constraints (Taghizadeh, Ebadi, Mohammadi, Pourreza, Kazemnejad, & Bagherzadeh, 2017). The families mostly do not exempt the working women from domestic work. Employers want their employees to spend full time on their job and look for the active participation of the employees in the workplace. The incapacity of the women to give full-time to the job along with the

full-time family demands hinders her career progress and can impair her work-life balance. The higher education sector has a traditional environment where men are still the most dominant members at the highest levels of the organization (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Achour, Grine, & Nor, 2014). Academics are expected not only to work as pedagogues but they have multiple occupancies of career and life counsellor, an administrator, facilitator, spoke person, resource person, innovator, and manager and custodian of knowledge. Student indifference, student impassivity, student unresponsiveness or indiscipline, poor student attendance, a large number of students in a class, hefty paperwork, an inappropriate attitude of colleagues, ineffectual leadership of heads of the department, less pronounced administrator, denial of opportunities for professional development, rock bottom salaries, deplorable relationships with students, disinterested behaviour in decision making, answerability of student's progress, exhaustion, frustration, incapacity, stagnation, languor, and lack of motivation or exuberance and unsupportive parents, etc. can muddle the work-life balance of an individual (Levine, Lin, Kern, Wright, & Carrese, 2011; Jang, 2009; Bell, Rajendran, & Theiler, 2012). In Pakistani society, the only socially sanctioned role for a woman is of homemaker, the new and extended role of women as an earner is putting a great deal of weight on her time and vitality. Without a doubt, balance is normally referred to as a challenge. Female academics entre the workforce in the critical phase of their lives, where they are pushed into marriage and parenthood that puts the burden on them to keep up a work-life balance (Papanek, 1964; Alavi, 1991). The dearth

of this balance inculcates guilt in a woman if she has not justified her domestic role and it has become challenging for female academics to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance. The above discussion shows that the dynamic nature of the academic sector and growing entry of the women in the labour force within the Pakistani society have posed the challenge of balancing work and home domains. This study was designed to investigate the experiences and factors that influence the work-life balance of female academics. Additionally, to comprehend the support they acquire from work and home domains for work-life balance.

### **Methodology**

**Research Design**-- Qualitative research design is utilized for this study as it is suitable to understand the phenomenon extensively. It enabled the researcher to concentrate on the lived encounters participants as they are continuously steering to balance the roles at homes and on the job. The technique of face-to-face interviews was chosen purposefully as we needed the opportunity to become drenched in our participants' encounters and to pick up thick portrayals of their experiences in higher education germane to balancing the roles.

### **Participants**

Convenience and snowball sampling was used for recruiting participants. The researcher's own personal and professional channels were utilized to access the participants. Then snowball sampling aided further in inducting participants converging at the same inclusion criteria. The parameters of becoming the component of the sample were: female, full-time faculty, experience starting from zero to any number of years, married/unmarried with or without

children, from young to old ones, having a nuclear or joint family system. Eighteen people assented to talk about their work-life balance experiences. The initial sample satisfied the saturation. Of our eighteen faculty members, eleven were married, five were single and one was divorced. Four were associate professors, six were assistant professors and eight were lecturers. Six participants reside with the joint family system and twelve dwell in a nuclear family system. Nine academics were employed in public sector universities and nine were working with private sector universities. Pseudonyms were relegated to the participants to ensure confidentiality.

#### ***Data collection procedure and analysis***

This study endeavoured to encapsulate idiosyncratic features and patterns of female academics' work-life balance in the academic sector in Pakistan. The exploratory study suited this objective. A semi-structured interview protocol was charted utilizing literature review and research objectives in perspective for the uncondensed views of our participants about balancing their roles at work and home domains. A female expert who was the faculty member was engaged in the development of the interview protocol process and also assisted in the analysis of the data. Then, the pilot study was conducted (1 single, 1 married with children, 1 with single mother). This study helped in refining the interview protocol. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher of the study. Field notes were also taken in the data collection process to seize the salient experiences of each participant. Later these field notes assisted in the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Step 1 was to get

familiar with the data through repeated and thorough reading. Early impressions and notes were jotted down. In Step 2, initial codes were generated that were identified inductively after reading the transcripts in detail. In Step 3, themes were searched based on the significant patterns in the data. Those patterns were collated into the themes. In Step 4, preliminary themes were reviewed and modified. Data linked with each theme was read again to ensure that data endorses it or not. In Steps 5 and 6, the themes were refined and written down. The credibility check was done with one member. Précis of the findings was dispensed to one of the participants of the pilot study. She was approached to assess the interpretations juxtaposed with her response and reaffirmed the accuracy. After completing the procedure, data was analyzed employing induction.

#### **Findings**

##### ***Work-life balance experiences***

Practically every one of the women had undergone through the situation when she faced impediments in harmonizing divergent and contrasting demands of the various domains of life. The renditions of the participants about these impediments were anchored in their present, the recent past and former past life circumstances. Penny was the peculiar case. She elucidated that she did not encounter issues since she had few responsibilities, parents do not assign much home-related tasks, mother is a housewife, she is single and has no kids, observes conventional office hours and no additional administrative assignments. However, some women find it difficult to synthesize the roles of wife, mother, daughter, friend, and supervisor concurrently and work-life balance management is different for the different working women. There are three

conditions related to the work-life balance equation. The first one is that their work and personal lives are working in tandem. The second one is that professional life has more weight than their personal life and third one is that personal life has more weight than professional life. These conditions are highly contingent on the phase of their lives, their personal preference, the role models they follow, relationship status, family, and the working environment decide what work-life balance equation they will have. The juggling of the multiple responsibilities becomes arduous for them. If she is married, she has to give time to in-laws, kids, husband, and relatives. Anna shared,

*"I cook. I look after my kids. I take them to the park. I make them study more. I take them somewhere out. This is what I can do for them. I manage guests at my place..... my husband and in-laws, they need more time of mine on weekends."*

This reflection stipulates that the women in academia also have limited options to balance her roles at home and on the job as she has to look after the home responsibilities after the job hours. Conventional gender roles subscribe the woman to be a prime caregiver and denial of the home responsibilities may disturb the peace of her personal life. consequently, she stretches herself beyond the limits to fulfill the family obligations. If she is single she feels an obligation to spend time with her parents and siblings to ensure her interest and participation in the family. Meager responsibilities of unmarried women and their regular presence on the job give them the feeling of guilt and detachment from their personal and family life; they want to compensate this deficiency and try to show

engagement with the family life. Olivia said,

*"At home, I feel that as (I am telling you repeatedly that) I am not spending sufficient time with my parents and family, for being not an active member at home, this thing keeps me in guilt."*

This implies that the burden of responsibilities is deeply embedded in the thinking of women that even if she is independent and living her "own" life, she takes it as a "perk" and remains in "subtle guilt". This guilt compels her to think that she is bypassing the pivotal gender norms of the society and women in academia harbor this guilt. Women also have different preferences and priorities in life concerning job and home. Few of the participants gave more importance to their work as compare to their home. According to the work at home can be managed and delayed or the family members understand their situation but on the job work cannot be left incomplete and they do not want to give chance to anyone to reprimand them. Cindy said,

*"I will prefer my work project over family commitment because at home you can make the family members to understand your situation but at the work place, no one listens to your excuses."*

This statement shows that competitive environment in academia has made the women to be aggressive on their jobs and they want to avoid the unwanted backlash and superficial sympathy from the colleagues and management.

Besides this some women find their jobs satisfying, meaningful and designed their lives around the job. This attitude was observed in married and unmarried women too. The common thing was that they consider their jobs an escaping place and there are many privileges attached



with their jobs like empowerment and financial stability. The unanticipated trend observed was that women do not take leaves despite the worst situations they faced in their personal lives. Jamie shared,

*“I did not take the extra leaves even when my mother in law and sister in law died in the same month.”*

Reasons behind that they want to be competitive on their job and do not want to bear the burden of the favors from the chairman or the head of the department. One factor identified was that they are not aware of the leave policy available at their work place. They want to be good performers on the job. On the other side, there was the woman who used to be not in the good books of the management because of her frequent leaves but she was satisfied as she got the title of good mother. Some women do not segregate their job from the home and they feel no problem in taking their job assignments to home but some women have compartmentalized these domains and leave the job work in office when they stepped out. Exhaustion and stress are the offshoots of the work-life balance. Sophia shared,

*“This is only me who is suffering, my husband is enjoying all the luxuries and I feel jealous...I am taking all the stress to survive in a joint family system and delivering minimum effort on the job.”*

Women also talked about the psycho-social stressors emanating from the poor work-life balance. When they are unable to complete their task on the job or some extra assignment is given to them. They have to spend extra hours at home for completing job related tasks after serving dinner and making bed for the kids. They do not think of sacrificing the family time because they want to be a

good mother and try to balance the roles by spending quality time with children and family. It is ingrained in their mind that they are supposed to be a good mother in any way. Society has also laid more burdens on them for raising the children. In the context of Pakistan, raising kids is considered the responsibility of the woman solely. Raising children is not deemed to be the collective responsibility of the whole family. If any member in the joint family system extends the help, it is seen as a favor granted. In the case of unmarried women, they do not hesitate to forego their family time and pay attention to the work they have brought to the home from office. It is because of the leverage provided to them by their parents and they do not put so much expectation and family demands on their daughters. They show cooperation. In that case household chores are mostly done by mother, brother's wife or maids. The continuous demand for the married woman from the home and for the unmarried women from the job and less quality time with family can cause stress among them. But there is a positive side of the job as well. Few women specifically for unmarried women job contribute to their health benefits as they seek refuge continuous pressure on them to get marry as the only valid identity for the woman is to be homemaker generally in a collectivistic society specifically. And for married women job also found to have positive health effects as their husbands become more participative in household labor and children become more responsible and confident. Remarks that work was 'restorative' or kept them away from becoming the victim of overthinking and depression; job assist them to lower their stress in many circumstances.

***Family and faculty life***

Participants through their conversation made one thing evident and that was the compounding of their responsibilities. This augmentation of the responsibilities from the job and home amplify their role conflict even in the academic sector which is considered female friendly occupation. There are the two main strand of the role conflict: the conventional notion of dividing the equal time between work and home domain which practically has become impossible in this era because of the prolonged office hours and competitive working environment. Some of the single females said that they feel like that they go to home just to sleep as there left no time for their family activities. The married female has to look after the dependents which are mostly parents, parents in laws, children and husband. Most of the females nowadays do not consider it necessary to serve food and to take an extreme care of their parents in law. This behavior is equivalent to challenging the century long developed tradition of the Pakistani society that daughter-in-law has to serve her parents-in-law more than her parents. They focus more on their husbands and children. Jill commented,

*“Even if you do not have any other responsibility, baby itself is a responsibility especially for a mother.”*

No matter how much support a woman gets but pregnancy, birthing, nursing and feeding is done by her. So, inevitably her work-life balance gets disturbed. This called for to discover a way that can limit the impedance of motherhood and family role for a working mother. There is a demographic shift in the Pakistani labor force as more women are employed in many sectors. Academic sector is one of them. One of the participants mentioned that after completing her PhD degree, she

was not able to produce any remarkable research. As she remains busy in wearing multiple hats. Our participants, regardless of family status, were acutely aware that balancing faculty roles particularly as a researcher is more daunting with children because of the motherly emotions she carries at the workplace. Mia shared,

*“So far as emotions are concerned, initially when I became a mother and have to come to the job by leaving my baby at home. The initial 1 hour you remain so emotional. Once you are on the job and you are honest with your responsibilities, you keep your emotions on the side and see the things professionally. Then you decide that this is your personal life and this is your professional life. Eventually you have to find out the balance between these two. Otherwise if you remain emotional you cannot carry on your professional life...marriage affected my research work too.”*

Marriage and the responsibility of the child divide the attention of the woman and her focus oscillates between home and job. Single faculty members also find it challenging as they contemplate about the hardships they will face after marriage and currently if they are pursuing PhD for career progression, they have to make the hard choices among studies, family commitments and professional choices. If they get married, they have to drop, delay or cancel the planning of doing a PhD. According to them, family is an affair that is inevitable and necessary to meet one's emotional and physical needs. They will choose to halt or drop their PhD or their job. Jennifer who was single and had no kids said,

*“I am single and others are married. Their life is more vulnerable. I am in good situation. If people become more disciplined, then they can manage well. There is a lot of pressure on the*

*married women. If they do not get the support and they have to do double works, then I think that they should leave the job or delay the PhD. So they should be at rest from one side at least.*"

This narrative proposes that women endure a bigger number of inconveniences in higher education settings as there is substantial strain to keep up efficiency and higher productivity for career advancement. In this way, family obligations, having kids and caring about them, is observed as a part of their daily routine even when they are within the premises of their job place. Family stipulations and young children keep the female faculty members under a great hassle. Nearly in every situation, demands and wants of the children supersedes all the females' responsibilities and it cannot be predicted what balance they will have if the children get sick or they get an unexpected call from their school. It will be the mother who will take the toll to manage these issues. Husbands got the excuses and relaxation. As the society has not conditioned them to take an acute care of the children in a nurturing manner, this idea is entrenched in the gender roles. The second reason is that academia is considered a suitable job for the females. Husbands present the seriousness and intensity of the corporate world or the market conditions as mostly the husbands of the female faculty members are self-employed, government employ or work in a private corporate sector where they have to meet the key performance indicators. Consequently, women have to put their job at the back and get ready to answer the family calls. It was detected in the Pakistani context in education sector that women do not delay their family planning. Instead they compromise on their career or

expand the period of their PhD. Women's career and life planning is like a house of cards that can be dashed to the ground any time due to the familial choices, societal or parental pressure to get marry and conceive a child in time. Monica was unfaltering in saying: *"I have delayed my PhD, due to my family planning."* Amanda shared this thought, *"I suffered five years of infertility and later I conceived. I started my job when my child began his school. Meanwhile, the mind set of my husband about working women also changed."*

This rumination reveals that despite having an ambitious approach in life, women place marriage and motherhood in the first place because the context of Pakistan pays more homage to the committed wife and caring mother in comparison with a successful woman. Few were ready to compromise the family commitments in order to give better future to their children and some were focused on giving more time to the children as their children will not remember them as a great teacher but as a caring mother. Vanessa unhesitatingly told that motherhood staunchly her success: *"My children will not remember my gold medals but they will remember that how I raised them."* Female academics were not confused in picking one of the roles of a family or a career but there was the consensus that having children stupefy the struggle to balance and sacrifices becomes obligations.

### **Social support**

This theme comprised the support extended from the two important domains, from the family and the workplace. Social support categories include spousal support, family support, domestic help, co-workers support and head of the department's support. This study detected that support

from the spouse is pivotal in having the balance between home and work place. The interviews revealed the important finding that husbands not only provided emotional support to their wives but also give a suggestion and advice to keep the balance between these two. They are also interested in developing the careers of their wives but if they found them in a miserable and depressed condition that happens when women get exhausted due to the continuous home and work struggle, they advise them to quit the job. Tina shared,

*“When I get frustrated from the job, I share with my husband, he advises me to quit the job if I am not managing job and home comfortably. he also says that when you will quit the job, you won’t be able to sit idly at home.”*

Females took this advice but rarely act upon this. They consider this phase temporary and re gain their energies after venting out all of their negative emotions. Moreover, they also consider the pros and cons of doing or leaving the job. Their inclination is more towards doing a job. They do not want to give up the freedom, empowerment and economic benefit associated with their job. Mona said,

*“I am doing more. I am greedy. I think I am not giving sufficient time to my son although I take him with me at office but was not able to give quality time. To keep cell phone at the side and give a quality time is important. I feel fine about my responsibilities but the problem is that I am a single mother not technically, I have a husband, he visits me on and off but living like that gives me problems sometimes. In a joint family system, I might not have babysitting problems. I kept him daycare twice but he fell ill. He cried and it induces guilt in me. Leave job*

*is not under consideration by me. As job leads to more empowerment and different version of freedom. Finance is a small part. It keeps you normal emotionally and mentally. Job is must. Kid, job and single parenting are a triangle for me.”*

Husbands also try to assist the women by taking care of children. If they are at home on Sunday and wife is on the job. They spend time with kids. Accompany and feed them till she arrives. They keep the child engaged. Presence of the dual earner couples in Pakistani society has changed the trends of doing home chores. Husband also plays part in doing household work which was nearly considered to taboo in Pakistan. Mandy shared that when she is in university on Sunday her husband spends time with children and get the work done by the maid. Although, a drastic shift from this mindset has not been observed but still there is an improvement. After husband the most important support in home domain is domestic help which is usually provided by the maids. No working woman can think about the balance in the absence of them as this study suggests. Quality of work done by these maids is a debatable topic. Cooks, drivers, cleaners and sweepers decrease the time spent by the working woman in doing these tasks. Women also take the help of their mother-in-laws and mothers in child rearing. They do not take a risk. If these are not available, they prefer them to drop them at the closest relatives’ home or bring them at their workplace. Aria said,

*“I do not leave my children at home alone. My sister in law lives near to my home. I drop my kids there...her children like to play with my kids. My mother-in-law and I have a maid who takes care of my children. This support*

*system lessens the intensity of guiltiness. Else, it would be arduous for me to manage. In my absence my husband keeps the kids engaged."*

Different participants called attention to the significance of chairman, head of the department and colleagues in dealing with their work-life balance. At the point when emergencies happen or personal issue arises they request their colleagues to take care of the work affairs on the job and intimate this arrangement with their colleagues to the head of the department. If an individual is not a shirker or habitual of taking excessive leaves, usually head of the departments do not mind these arrangements made to balance the work and home. When colleagues help each other in this way, they try to reciprocate each other at the time of the need. Some of the responses given by the participants are, *"Our head of the department is supportive," "We can tell them a problem and can leave for the home commitment," "He understands and cooperates with us."* *"Colleagues take care of the classes in our absence."* Hence, the support extended by the work place aids in balancing the home and work. Females normally approach their head of the department and colleagues for the favor so that they can disseminate their home and job responsibilities.

### **Strategies for work-life balance**

Research recommends that professionals have to carve their strategies for bringing a desired balance in their life. Their personalized goals and objectives are embedded in these strategies. They try to come up with the amalgamation of their personal and professional strengths that can assist them in fulfilling their obligations in both domains. The analysis of data identified the strategies typically

utilized by the females are planning, prioritizing the responsibilities, seeking refuge and help in prayers (Faith) and time management. Participants narrated their planning behavior before occurrence of the important family or job events. Karen being *'passionate ambitious'* believed that this attitude permitted her to stay engrossed in her job and she plans appropriately to deliver her responsibilities and targets laid down for the work. Ava shared about her strategies, *"I will plan the things before they happen and if I know that an important event is going to happen in a family, I will plan my work accordingly and seek the cooperation."* While conducting interview sessions, *"understanding," "cooperation,"* and *"informal strategies,"* were the requirements mentioned by the most of the participants for compartmentalizing multiple roles they play each day. Prioritization of work or home is contingent on the situation at home and the job. But there were the participants who had pre chosen their priority; either it was the home or job. It assisted them in deciding on an urgent basis when they have to choose between a home or job call. As Scarlett advocated,

*"We should accept the family responsibilities in the first place and avoid our obsession with the job tasks."*

Her response shows setting priorities is important as it can permit to appreciate every moment of life, as faculty member direct her energies towards the role they prioritize without a negative spillover. The snare of being available every minute of every day as a result of excessive technology intrusion (email, text messages, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.), is a prime reason and conflict creation, since it can permit consistent correspondence

without separating yourself from the job. A large number of participants tried to set the guidelines to limit their communication related to job once they are at home. For example, Rebecca said,

*“I believe it is extremely useful to define limits with students. Although, I have an access to WhatsApp at any time, I deliberately give replies students in specific timings. They need to understand that I want to have limited interaction with them. While there are many others who are continually noting messages and working late as a result of it.”*

Faith is also used by the participants as a coping strategy. Participants responded that while taking a shot at a troublesome errand or venture, they believed that their problem is petty and with the God’s help they can get through any difficult situation. This belief also helped them in surviving situations when they do not know what to do? Participants shared: they “pray, “recite”, “listen Quran”, “supplication” and “telling rosary.” These restores their strength and they deal with the work-life balance issues with vigor by putting their whole faith in their God. Relationship with God assists the participants in harmonizing and effectively managing the different life roles as it gives meaning to whatever they are doing on their job and at home. Participants identified effective time management as a crucial element in balancing work and home. Zoey contemplated,

*“If I am looking forward that this thing is going to be happened I will finish the work earlier so that I can see others. Time management is needed. If I have planned the things before I will stay calm.”*

Some participants present work-life balance as an elusive idea. A person doesn’t have clones that can be present at both places at the same time. Dissipating a lot of energy in one domain can mar the performance of an individual in the other domain because of the finite reservoir of time, energy and resources. Individuals do not have boundless energy to expend in every domain. Long hours at work, for instance, can culminate in a series of negative self-talk: “I’m letting my family down by studying and observing complete office hours for nothing.” Conversely, leaving work early to get the child vaccinated or attend their parents-teachers meeting can trigger the apprehensions, “I am doing everything at home and on the job, my husband can be here for this purpose.”, “I should not be doing everything and get prominent in the eyes of the management by taking undue favors.” These declarations adjoin guilt and shame, and the vicious cycle continues. Participants also shared that how they manage the time and follow their daily routines religiously. Many shared the significance of “setting priorities,” “being focused,” and “time management and allocation for each task at home and on the job.”

This finding is congruous with the precursory anecdotal and empirical reports that employing time management as a craft for work-life balance is an effective strategy. Through time management female faculty members have the opportunity to balance their lives. Some have the approach that life just happens and there is no exigency to think about the work-life balance and stress yourself out.

### **Discussion**

Work-life balance is a constant troublesome endeavour for working

women around the globe. This can be observed distinctly in the traditional societies, for example, Pakistan, where women are still striving to be treated with parity in the job market and her activity showcased outside the home is not embraced readily and interaction with *a-mahrams* in the work place is staunchly discouraged. Contemporary female labour force participation and the gendered division of labor are the contrasting factors affecting the work-life balance. Women's personal and professional choice tend to be influenced by gender roles and should be aligned with the family's honor and prestige. This collision of home and job expectations culminate in work-life balance issues. The discoveries uncover that although women confront challenges in striking work-life balance, they simultaneously appear to appreciate the social and financial independence furnished by their employed status. Interestingly, study insinuated that in the conventional society where this study was situated, women had an ambition and courage to continue with the career. Despite facing the challenges from the personal life, living up to the expectations of the society and keeping the religious doctrines in mind, they are carving their niche in the labor market. They have the intentions of becoming an unstoppable in pursuing their career but they still keep on choosing their family life and refrain from violating the established societal norms. None of the participants have expressed the overt rebellious sentiments to achieve success in career or she wants to focus entirely on her job because she is passionate about it. Some of the participants explicitly mentioned that work was a passion for them but when it came to becoming a good mother, wife, daughter in

law; they put their career ambitions behind or at least concealed it and showed conformity with the social norms. They have developed the characteristic of being resilient after facing work-life balance challenges. They have a "helicopter view" and "fluid view" towards the work-life balance and keep a keen eye towards the multiple aspects of their life so that they can fulfill the roles without bothering others in home and job domain. They are not vocal about their work-life balance frustration. They believe that flow of life sometimes can be more towards personal life and sometimes towards professional life as the different situations demand varied response towards balancing a work and home. For some of them work-life balance is not a thing to talk about. For them this is how the life goes on. Some said that it is unattainable goal and far-fetched idea. Some were the opponents of this idea and keep endeavoring to balance these two domains.

Women who are married admit that they have inadequate time and energy to disburse after coming back from the job. They have limited their social lives and hardly find a time to entertain guests. There is a huge responsibility of raising children on them. If they have babies they have to feed them, arranging maids for them, looking for daycare centers and attends them in case they fell sick. When children are attending school then pick and drop, preparation of lunch, homework, attending parents' teachers meeting and the list goes on. On the job fronts they are observing official hours, taking classes, supervising and mentoring students and doing administrative tasks is a tiresome series of events for them. Lastly, few women talked about recreational time for them since they are at present enrolled a

PhD Program which requires a generous measure of time. Most of the participants did not have sufficient time for leisure or self-care activities and limits their optimum work-life balance. Motherhood presents additional obligations to the working women and affects her relationship with husband, parents in laws, her life preferences and her career path. Many women mentioned that they were not able to pursue personal interests due to the plethora of work and family commitments. However, they were willing to make personal sacrifices for the greater cause of achieving the work-family balance.

This study highlighted the role of spouse and family support for female academics to achieve the work-life balance. Husband plays a pivotal role in working woman's life to procure the balance between these two domains of life. Other studies also supported that husband's cooperation and participation is a pervasive theme. The accounts of the participants substantiate the past findings (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011; Doble & Supriya, 2010; Charles & Harris, 2007). This study found that apart from family and domestic help females were dependent on their husbands more for the emotional support rather than the instrumental support. Husbands are willing to extend help to their wives but the traditional role of breadwinner and social norms restrict them to be helpful towards wives in home chores. Therefore, there is a need to study further that with the evolving role of woman, is the role of man is also transforming to match with the double edged role of the woman e.g. earner and home maker? Still in developing countries like Pakistan, it is a taboo that man will play the role of home maker. The concept

of "male mom" is out of the question. Even among the dual earner couples, women are bind to take up the homemaker role predominantly. Her earning is not considered valuable and it is deemed as a "bonus" earning. Her prime responsibility is to be homemaker. Even if she is given a choice to pursue her career by slacken the homemaker role, she stays in a perpetual regret and guilt lowering her capability to manage work-life balance. Domestic help and organization's cooperation are requisite for achieving work-life balance when woman is disseminating multiple roles. Hiring reliable maids and lack of formal Human resource policies in the organizations hinders work-life balance. So, women feel need to devise their own strategies and informal ways to maintain a work-life balance. Women are underrepresented in higher education. Although academia is considered a female friendly profession, but even in this field there are traces of patriarchy are manifested by confining women to the lower positions and mainly the reason is the socio-cultural context of Pakistan that strictly frames the woman in homemaker role. Her role as a producer and care giver cannot be negated by the society. Marriage and family structure of Pakistan impose peculiar set of challenges in maintaining a balance between her family and work role. So, considering the home as an ideological and physical space for woman, the outside world is not deemed to be her domain. Overall, our findings point to the certitude that the multiple roles of female academics in Pakistan, the nature of the higher education and the socioeconomic context of Pakistan present peculiar circumstances for female academics to attain work-life balance.



**Conclusion-** Work-life balance can be attained by Pakistani female academics by positioning their priorities in the home and work domain. Social customs, family structures, cultural establishments and gender based socialization impacts women's work-life balance. However, if the support systems at workplace from formal (work-life balance policies and programs) and informal channels (head of the department, colleagues and supervisors) are functional they can assist women in maintaining a balance. Most of the women negated the awareness about organizational Human resources policies and usually undertake informal strategies

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