

The Work Family Life Balance Of Married Working Women During The Time Of Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

This present study aimed to investigate the experiences of married working women regarding the Work-Family life balance (WFLB) during the time of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Three main objectives were explored in this research. Firstly, it explored the understanding of WFLB among married working women. Then, it explored the challenges faced by women in attaining WFLB during the lockdown period. Lastly, the coping strategies were explored and adopted by women to attain WFLB during the time of lockdown. The qualitative research methodology was used for the present research. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample of 12 married teachers from Government College University (GCU), Lahore. In-depth interviews were conducted as a method of data collection and an in-depth interview guide was used as a data collection tool. Saturation was achieved during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth interviews. The research findings indicate various conflicting situations during work from home which are further categorized into three categories i.e. work-life challenges, family-life challenges and challenges related to mental wellbeing. However, findings also reveal that women were able to achieve WFLB by adopting coping strategies such as compromising in situations, time management, seeking help from family, seeking help from organizations and religiosity.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, the world was awakened to the reality of a new highly contagious sickness known as COVID-19, which has spread across multiple countries and shown to be a highly infectious disease (Adisa et al, 2021; Boca et al, 2020; Mussida & Patimo, 2021; Tomohiro, 2021; Butakhieo & Vyas, 2020). Given the global COVID-19 pandemic situation, the world has faced a changed environment that they never had come across. It has significantly altered how people live and work around the world i.e the work from home was introduced (Adisa et al, 2021; Boca et al, 2020; Butakhieo & Vyas, 2020; Akanji et al, 2022; Teo et al, 2020).

Women were responsible for homeschooling their children in addition to taking care of the home and the elderly during this time (Kalsoom, 2021; Kara et al, 2021). The extent and amount of domestic work expanded dramatically as a result of COVID-19's global spread, along with children being out of school, greater care responsibilities for dependents, and intensive cleaning and health services (Uddin, 2021). For professional women who also had to take care of their families, run households, and teach their children at home, things were much more difficult (Alon et al, 2020; Fodor et al, 2020; Hazarika & Das, 2020).

It is also necessary to keep in mind that one of the careers with the highest levels of stress is

teaching (Johnson et al., 2005; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Heavy workloads, excessive administrative work, time restraints, lack of autonomy, emotional labour, fear of losing control of the class, managing innovation and change and fear of receiving a bad evaluation, are some of the stressors that teachers experience on a regular basis (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Covid-19 has increased the number of stressors. Lack of resources, a lack of preparation for online learning, and managing work and life when the lines between school and home are blurred are some of the extra difficulties (Kalsoom & Shah, 2021, in press; MacIntyre et al., 2020).

In the present study, married working women are the focus of the study concerning the significant shifts from work offices to working from home and the instability that they experienced during the lockdown period of the COVID pandemic. Married working women had a variety of obstacles even without COVID-19, one of which was achieving a balance between their work and family life (Adisa et al, 2021; Uddin, 2021). To understand the difficulties they had as working women (teachers) along with their other social roles, the current study attempted to analyze the experiences of Pakistani teachers. The challenges have been found in previous literature as well but more research is needed to understand the effects of Covid-19, particularly on teaching mothers because of the previous lack the research on the teachers. Such a study is crucial in a situation where the majority of educated women choose teaching as their profession (Raja, 2015).

The idea of working from home brought its different concepts into the light one of which is Work and Family life balance (WFLB) (Adisa et al, 2021; Akanji et al, 2022). The concept of Work and Family life balance has been in discussion with different situations in the field of research for decades. Now, this study sheds light on this concept during the time of Covid-19 as

well as the challenges in attaining it in a developing country like Pakistan.

The following are the objectives of the present study:

- To know the understanding of WFLB of married women
- To explore the challenges faced by the married working women during the time of lockdown (work from home) in attaining WFLB
- To know the coping strategies adopted by married working women during the time of Covid-19 in attaining WFLB

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various studies conducted by various researchers about the work-family life balance of individuals and now the research on women is also coming to light (Kalsoom, 2021; Uddin, 2021; Adisa et al, 2021; Boca, 2020; Marpaung, 2020; Lonska et al, 2021; Akanji et al, 2022; Kara et al, 2021). Studies show that there were multiple factors that influenced the work-family balance of married working women either positively or negatively and they were noticed to be intensified in this period. (Kalsoom, 2021; Uddin, 2021). The negative intensification was because the women did not have any help from their house help, daycare centers, family members etc. because of the nationwide lockdown and social distancing (Uddin, 2021). Women's hours of housework and family responsibilities increased regardless of how men worked, whereas increases in men's hours of housework were reliant on how women worked which resulted in their female coworkers' job losses and leaves (Andrew et al, 2020; Mussida & Patimo, 2021; Boca et al, 2020; Adisa et al, 2021).

The confinement policies implemented to stop the spread of Covid-19 and deeply ingrained

patriarchal norms in some countries have made women's stress levels worse. It was because of their conventional gender norms and an archetypal belief that takes men as “bread-winners” and females as “homemakers” (Akanji et al, 2022; Uddin, 2021). Moreover, working women were greatly affected due to teleworking during the time of Covid-19 as it led to role conflict. Due to the cohabitation of both the work and family roles, it was difficult for women to differentiate between roles due to the overlapping of roles. Women's general health is likely to worsen as a result of such demands to fulfill both job and family obligations. This led to a loss of personal resources (such as time, energy, and income), which has resulted in career stagnation, health difficulties, and increased male chauvinism (Kalsoom, 2021; Adisa et al, 2021). While some women's mental health was even worse due to abusive partners or physically challenged children (Kalsoom, 2021).

Literature also shows that the ratio of men contributing to household responsibilities is increasing with the advancement in time. Andrew et al, 2020 indicated that males are also contributing considerable amounts of their time to family responsibilities, even though mothers are still overwhelmingly responsible for the - greatly expanded - time spent on childcare and housework. This is especially true for couples in which the mother has kept her job while the father has lost his. In these homes, fathers are now responsible for slightly more than half of childcare and housekeeping.

In spite of various difficulties, few of the literature has shown that “work from home” has acted as a positive factor for some. It has served as a motivational factor for married working women as it allowed them to balance between work and family life which they were not able to do previously. The motivation was because of the increased time that women were able to spend with their families. The reason for this was that

working individuals had to spend less time commuting to work, which allowed them to spend more time with their families (Adisa et al, 2021; Pedersen et al, 2009; Wu et al, 2022; Alhas, 2020)). Additionally, the social isolation and loneliness brought on by the work from home during the Covid-19 epidemic encouraged people to spend more time with their families to receive social support. Moreover, Pierce et al. (2020) claimed in their study that for some people changes in the educational system, work responsibilities, increased socioeconomic security, increased family time, and reduced commuting time could result in minimized stress and increased mental health and well-being.

Adisa et al, 2021 have also stated in their research the favourable correlation between increasing work and family responsibilities, role conflict, family values and closeness, and lower rates of juvenile delinquency and criminality during the lockdown period. They further highlight that for women spending time alone at home has improved their marriages, brought families closer together, and even led to an increase in parent-child intimacy—things that had previously been hampered by the conflicting demands of paid jobs and other non-work activities. The women felt fulfilled by playing several roles (via multitasking), especially when it came to the advantages of being close to their family members and reinvigorating family values.

During the pandemic, the shift of mode of work had introduced various challenges in everybody's life but the most affected were the married working women according to the literature. These challenges were necessary to examine in order to improve the life of the married women. The literature mostly focused through a quantitative research study and lacked a detailed approach to understand and identify the problems faced by the married working women. Lack of focusing on the condition of working women of a third world country like Pakistan was another limitation of

previous studies. So, it was necessary to examine the effect of work from home on the married working women's life of Pakistan in a comprehensive research using the qualitative research design.

The present study focused on the following questions regarding the WFLB of married working women:

1. What is the understanding of working women regarding the WFLB?
2. What were the challenges women faced in attaining the WFLB?
3. Were the women able to achieve the WFLB during the lockdowns of Covid-19?

Research Design

The Covid-19 pandemic's effects on the married working women's WFLB of GC University were investigated in this study using a qualitative research method, specifically a narrative approach. The focus of this study revolves around the interpretive-constructivist. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents of GC University i.e. the married permanent teachers. The tool for the data collection was the in-depth interview guide. An in-depth interview guide was prepared for the one-to-one in-depth interviews including the research questions and the possible probing questions. Twelve respondents were interviewed for the research because the saturation point was achieved. Each interview was 20-25 minutes long and was bilingual i.e. in both English and Urdu. Ethical considerations were strictly followed during this research. The data analysis for the transcribed interviews i.e. verbatim was conducted in four steps as given by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) which were data preparation, data exploration, data reduction and data interpretation.

FINDINGS

The findings of the present study obtained through the in-depth interviews from the married working women of GCU reflects the challenges faced by them during the pandemic due to the work from home. The themes which were derived out of the verbatim were categorized under the relevant objectives of this research which are discussed below.

Understanding of Work-Family life balance (WFLB) of married women

While conducting the interviews, the respondents were asked about their understanding of Work Family Life Balance (WFLB). Respondents shared their individual explanations of WFLB.

WFLB as absence of role conflict:

The common theme that emerged from the data for this objective was the absence of role conflict. The respondents had considered that their work and family life both were in balance if they did not face any conflict in both life domains i.e. work and family life. Furthermore, they believed that if their work and family lives did not intermingle only then they could achieve the balance and resultantly avoid the conflict among the roles of both domains. The respondents explained their understanding of WFLB as:

In my opinion, knowing that your work and family lives are two separate roles and that you have to manage both of them separately without intermingling them is the balance between these two.

Respondent K

In my opinion, the work- family life balance is doing only work when I am at work while only investing and

thinking about family when I am with my family.

Respondent L

The fact that when I am at home, nobody and no thought should disturb me and when I am at office then it should be the same.

Respondent I

Furthermore, 91% of the respondents believed that being able to balance the two lives perfectly and separately is the definition of WFLB.

WFLB as satisfaction:

Data revealed that one of the respondents linked the work family life balance with the sense of satisfaction an individual attains after performing the roles of work and family life. So, if the respondent achieved the sense of satisfaction in performing her roles of both the domains then for her it was the WFLB. The respondent described the WFLB as:

In my opinion, it should be linked with Satisfaction. The reason is that if I complete my university' tasks and then I get sufficient time for my baby, my husband, my family and I am satisfied with that then it is balance. But if i am dissatisfied and I think that I am unable to give sufficient time to my job tasks like if I could not prepare the lecture as I should have because of any engagement in any task of my home or if I am not able to give time to my family

commitments because I was busy in my job-related tasks so this is imbalance.

Respondent A

Challenges faced by the married working women during the time of lockdown

The second objective of the study was to identify the challenges faced by the respondents during the lockdown in attaining the WFLB. The data revealed through the in-depth interviews various challenges faced by the respondents. These challenges were further categorized under the work life challenges, family life challenges and challenges related to mental well-being.

Challenges faced in work life

In the work life, the data revealed that the respondents faced many hindrances in attaining the work family life balance. These challenges are discussed below:

Academic Incivility:

According to the data, academic incivility was a major challenge faced by the majority of the respondents. The academic incivility is the non-serious behavior of students which they showed during the online lectures. These include not responding to the teacher, leaving the classes after the attendance and making excuses for not attending the classes etc. One respondent explained the challenge as following:

Originally, I had the idea in my mind that I will be conducting online classes with everyone's video just like a video call and that I will be able to look at my students and vice versa. But after asking the students again and again to switch on their cameras they didn't. So..... If only 6-7 students respond out of the 45 strength of class

then it was very stressful for me. Students would join classes but not respond, they would sleep after joining and it was a difficult task to keep them active. Then, during the online examination it was a difficult task to give them the grades because I would suspect that maybe they were not solving the papers themselves and were taking help from outside sources. But then again, I would leave it on their faith and trust them (laughing sarcastically).

Respondent A

The students instead of learning, learned how to cheat more efficiently! Infact the students were not attending the classes. They came online and then there was no response from the students which I think that they were sleeping! So, for a teacher it's quite easy to deliver the lecture online but for the students, it's not a very good idea.

Respondent J

The data depicted that 75% of respondents mentioned academic incivility as a major issue during the time of lockdown.

Technical challenges

Another commonly mentioned problem by the respondents was the technical disturbances during the lectures and their work hours. The technical challenges that were faced by the respondents included the distortion in the internet and electricity as well as the lack of technical knowledge of the respondents. The respondents described their experience of this challenge as:

I faced a lot of problems in using the technology that I even called my nephew at 12 at night once to ask him for help. I asked him to guide me how to send a link so that everyone can join. So, he explained to me in detail but later on he had to come tell me in person. Even then I could not understand it and so I had to go to my son to guide me through this. Sometimes, during the lectures I was gesturing to my son to tell me what to do. Then by keep doing it again and again I started understanding the technology a little bit.

Respondent F

Some teachers faced technological issues more than others because of their lack of knowledge in technology. As per the data, around 54% of respondents mentioned this as one of the challenges faced by them during the lockdown.

The online classes were new for me but the technology wasn't. I did not face difficulty in adapting to the technology because I already had knowledge of the technology

Respondent I

On the other hand, the data showed that 41 % of respondents disagreed with it. They did not face technological disturbances because they were tech-friendly.

Work Efficiency

The respondents have also mentioned that while working from home they were not able to do their work as efficiently as they could do before the pandemic. It was because before Covid-19 they had the proper time for their work life without the interference from their family lives. Moreover,

they did not know how to improve their work efficiency during this time period. For instance, respondent L stated that:

Before Covid, it was a very professional routine. I would be a teacher and in my professional role when I was at work and I would be a mother when I was at home. Moreover, before Covid the professionalism was there, but in Covid, even my work efficiency was affected and everything was intermingled.

Respondent L

Here, the respondent stated how the work efficiency was absent because of the lack of professionalism and intermingling of the domains. Another respondent added to this challenge as:

There weren't any major issues. The only thing that I felt was that the efficiency of work was very disturbed due to which I was not able to do my job as I would do in the normal days. I could manage the time somehow but I was not sure how to improve my work efficiency.

Respondent K

The respondent K stated that she was unable to do the job properly as she would do in the before Covid-19 period and that she did not know how to improve the efficiency of work. Similarly, the data revealed the response of another respondent which is as following:

During the Covid, we could work online, but when we're working online we're not giving that kind of input, we're far away from our students, we

don't know how they are behaving, how they are working, are they doing well or not. Especially our research life is very affected because we're mostly working in a lab and we have very little public relations, so yes it's affected a lot. Moreover, I worked in the presence of my kids and family members as well. So, there was a lot of interference, but I could not do anything about it. I just had to compromise with it. But this interference of family members during my lectures would really affect my work efficiency.

Respondent H

As per the data, the majority of the working women agreed to this challenge as they were unable to do the work efficiently during the time of lockdown.

Unrealistic expectation of students

Data revealed that the teachers also mentioned that they faced stress during the lockdown periods because of the expectations of students they faced in the form of untimely calls and messages etc. A teacher telling about her experience replied:

Students contact us 24/7 and I get irritated from this (angry). Even some students complained to VC that I didn't respond to them on time, even though I'm trying to respond to them (frustrated).

Respondent B

The teacher's mention of the word 'irritated' here shows the stress she experienced due to this. When asked about this question from another respondent, she replied:

Yes, I had faced this issue from the side of the students. They would keep asking me for the meeting link even before the class time. It was annoying but then I tried to understand their position. Furthermore, they would also message or email me other than my work hours.

Respondent A

When respondent A was asked about this issue, she also agreed to this and shared her experience of the student's unrealistic expectations from her.

Online teaching was difficult and the first problem in that was statistics was hard to teach online. Let's suppose if I am explaining a notation X^n , the students do not get it till you write on board but I took control of this issue very quickly because I have a device called pen tablet which is used as white board if you attached it with your laptop. It is so similar to register and pen. This made things easier but students weren't happy with it because someone was taking classes from laptop, and some from phones so it wasn't visible to everyone.

Respondent M

The data revealed that the respondents faced this issue a lot when the mode of teaching shifted to online teaching during the lockdown.

Shift of mode of teaching

The data revealed another challenge mentioned by the respondents which was the sudden shift in the mode of teaching. The lockdown brought a new concept in the lives of the teachers as well as its challenges. The teachers did not like this way of teaching because for some teachers it was difficult to use the technology which increased

the stress level in women. This stress demanded extra time from them to learn the technology. Following were the responses of the respondents to explain the issue. To explain the issue, respondent explained:

In the beginning, it was very difficult, it was difficult till the end but the difference was only that after some time we had gotten used to this mode of teaching. Everything was a totally new concept for me. I did not like the online teaching at all because it was a challenge for teaching. It hampered the quality of teaching. The whole concept was very new to me, the online classes, the teaching modes like zoom, MS teams etc and I had no prior knowledge of how to use them so it was difficult to cope up with but I had to learn it.

Respondent L

It was a totally new experience for me since I am not that connected to even a cell phone as I use it only when I need it. But after Covid, suddenly, we had to use tools like zoom and team, and I did not know a thing about it.

Respondent F

Stress from organization

The data showed that only one respondent experienced stress from the organization while all others did not face any stress from their organizations. It was because the respondent felt the expectation of her department was high from them which made a stressful impact on her. She narrated her experience as:

The expectations of my department were high. I did face stress from my organization's demands because my

subject was Urdu and to fulfill those requirements there weren't many options.

Respondent D

Challenges faced in family life

The data showed that women faced challenges in family life as well. The challenges that they faced in this domain are as follows:

Role strain

According to the data, the majority of the women mentioned that they had to face the role strain because they were performing different roles and each role had expectations from them. The expectations of each role put stress on them due to which they faced role strain. Role strain was explained by a respondent as following:

It was difficult because I had to manage time to be able to spend time with my family and my child. I had to work late at nights and even work on weekends as well so that I could keep peace with my family members. This physically tired me a lot and would frustrate me even further. Because before COVID I had set time for both my work and family life but now everything was happening together. I have to give food to my child; play with her, make her study; take her online classes along with her. So, it was all very hectic and unmanageable for me at some point. I was very exhausted because I was doing too much than I could handle at the same time. Sometimes, I would not even know about the things that I was doing at the same time and it would cause chaos. Tasks won't finish properly and I had to spend more time fulfilling my duties as a teacher.

Respondent I

For me it's difficult, because I am a researcher and I was not able to perform well on online mode. We had to do home chores side by side with online classes. I can't focus on my work in an online setting. It is very difficult to take classes on Zoom with young children.

Respondent G

Changed Social Patterns

The data brought another issue in the light which was common to almost all the respondents. The data disclosed that due to the lockdown, women also suffered from the sudden shift in the usual pattern of living in their family life which brought fear resulting in stress. This challenge is explained below:

It was very unexpected and it was a sudden shift of situation for me. Everything was so sudden and this changed the whole lifestyle of people and it was something that we never experienced before. Overall, I was very scared of it because we were not supposed to touch things, meet anyone, go anywhere. It was a very scary thought.

Respondent L

This changed pattern of living is further explained as:

The first wave of the Covid and the first lockdown had brought so much stress and fear. We would not go outside the house and stay home all the time. We observed the social distancing completely as well.

Moreover, it was difficult for me to grasp the idea of online teaching because my subject was Urdu.

Respondent D

Unannounced guests

As per the data, some of the respondents mentioned that they faced a further challenge during the lockdown which was the unannounced visits from the relatives during the time of their classes or their household chores. The sudden visits from the relatives would disturb their routine and was against the Covid-19 SOPs as well. If the respondents avoided such relatives then they would be called rude in their families. On the other hand, majority respondents did not face this issue as they would strictly follow the Covid-19 SOP's Respondent A has stated this issue as:

I found it stressing when relatives would want to meet us even when they were supposed to stay at their homes and avoid social gatherings. I wanted to follow all the precautionary measures but couldn't do so because of the unannounced visits from the relatives. Then even when I was suffering from COVID along with my husband and son we had rented a separate room from our family to quarantine ourselves.....

Respondent A

Yes, a lot, but I focused on my work, and made excuses from them that I am taking my classes. But this definitely makes them think of me as a negative and rude person.

Respondent G

The data revealed that 25% of respondents faced the sudden visits from relatives while 75% respondents disagreed with this issue when they were asked regarding this challenge. Respondent

N also agreed to the disturbances faced due to the sudden visits by the relatives and them not following the SOP's properly. On the other hand, the other respondents did not face this issue during the lockdown. For instance, respondent F replied to this question as:

Relatives never came as we followed SOP's strictly.

Respondent F

Work-Family Boundary Blurring

Another issue that was highlighted by the respondents in the data was work-family boundary blurring. This issue was highlighted by most of the respondents. The respondents were unable to set proper boundaries between their work and family life which resulted in intermingling of the roles and also the blurring of the boundaries of work and family life. One of the respondents describe the issue as:

Hmmm... (sighed) Again it was difficult at first, it was difficult to draw a line between both as you're at home and at your job at the same time. It had become pretty confusing and juggling but with time I got to know how to differentiate between them. I would work during my work hours with concentration and then would do house related chores after that. So, they were both going on side by side.

Respondent A

The respondent explained how the two domains of the lives were intermingled with each other which resulted in the blurring of boundaries of these domains. Another respondent added to this challenge as:

It was very hectic initially as the lives were now intermingled, but I was happy too because my travel time and my energy would be saved and I was then able to spend those times with my family. I would work during my work hours with concentration and then would do house related chores after that. So, I was doing everything all together due to which the specific boundaries were not there as they used to before Covid.

Respondent L

The family life along with my work life had become very hectic. I would do take the classes and then as soon as there was a break I would switch to the family chores. It was like I was both at the same time.

Respondent D

The data revealed that all of the respondents stated this issue in one way or another which shows that this was a common issue faced by all the respondents during the time of lockdown.

Covid-19 influenced socialization

When asked about her experience of lockdown, a respondent revealed a different issue that she faced during the time of lockdown which is the socialization of children under the influence of Covid-19. Being mothers, the respondents were worried for their children as well because their socialization, education and environment was influenced by Covid-19. The respondents explained the issue as:

It was not good as everyone had to limit their outings etc so it in a way affected them, children were difficult to handle. But then we had to follow the precautionary measures so we had

to limit ourselves. I would handle my children with religious and scientific reasoning. Infact, it was a dilemma in my opinion that the adolescents were socialized with COVID more. My son's some of the earliest words were, "Quarantine", "move away", "don't hug" etc

Respondent L

Children were affected due to the Covid as well. I felt like their minds were unable to grow during this time and this would make me think of other ways to improve their experience of staying at home so that they don't get negatively affected by Covid.

Respondent G

I was worried because my child was not in school during this time. I was unable to admit her in any school because we had just recently arrived from New Zealand and the lockdown was imposed as soon as we came to Pakistan. So, I was worried because my child's socialization and education was getting negatively affected due to the Covid. So being an educated parent it was very stressful for me and my husband as well

Respondent M

Only three teachers stated this challenge because they had the children of school going age while the others did not face this issue because their children were either adolescents or the adults.

Gendered prejudices

Another issue that came forward in challenges as per the data was gendered prejudices. Women felt

that being a woman they had to face prejudices of people around them. Even though the majority of respondents had family support during this time, they still felt that some things which were acceptable for the males were not acceptable for them by their family members like mother in laws etc. Following were the responses of the respondents:

Even though my family was supportive, there were little distractions and interference during my lectures because no matter how hard our society's people try they still cannot fully understand the fact that a woman can do both office work and household work. They would think that I am just passing time on my laptop etc. So, if you are working from home, you won't be considered as a working woman but just as an ordinary human being sitting and doing nothing while the male counterparts would be given proper seclusion.

Respondent J

Another respondent replied when she was asked if she wants to add any other challenge that she faced during the lockdown as:

I want to add that working from home for females is very tough as compared to male, because they don't have house chores, they don't have to manage kids at home. This is the reason that their progress rate was high as compared to females, organizations should keep this thing in mind whenever they present things at any platform that will help them in evaluation.

Respondent G

Psychological Challenges

Another challenge that respondents mentioned was the psychological stress that they experienced during the lockdown. The data revealed that the respondent faced psychological stress due to the social media's coverage of the pandemic. They also revealed that staying away from family members and relatives in case of being diagnosed by Covid-19 as well as just staying at home was stressful and depressing. Moreover, the Covid-19 had also affected the plans of the respondents which also disturbed them a lot. Following were the responses given by the respondents while explaining this challenge.

Mental health obviously gets disturbed when you or your family goes through any disease. For Covid, you get very stressed psychologically as you have to quarantine yourself for 14 days away from your family and same was the case with me. This whole COVID situation affected my mental health very badly.

Respondent A

My mental health was very disturbed, because of it. I went into depression as I was supposed to leave for Germany for summer training school but due to the COVID I couldn't leave. Due to the Covid, it felt like life was over and that doomsday had come. Moreover, social media was increasing the anxiety and fear in me and in fact everyone. Even though I am a psychologist, I am a human too and I was very much afraid of the whole scenario at that time. Although with time, we got used to COVID. Now it isn't a scary thought anymore.

Respondent L

There wasn't much of an effect of it on my mental health. I was only anxious due to the COVID but other than that it did not directly affect me because I kept myself busy and away from Covid related news. My mental health was normal. There weren't any such big issues. I was very frustrated sometimes with the family members because sometimes misunderstandings develop between family members but we would let go of the situation.

Respondent K

Coping strategies adopted by married working women during to WFLB

According to the data, the women highlighted that despite having multiple challenges they were able to attain the WFLB with the help of some outside help or a coping strategy. The coping strategies through which the married working women obtained the work family life balance are as follows:

Compromising on the situations

Another theme that emerged from the data regarding the coping strategies of WFLB was compromise. All the respondents understood the WFLB as compromising on their relaxing time, hobbies, priorities and in other matters as well. The respondents believed this to be the only way through which the work and family life balance can be achieved as well as calling compromise as the other name of the WFLB. The respondents explained their understanding as follows:

A woman has to sacrifice a lot more than we think. Like she sacrifices her relaxation time, if she wants to do something then she has to limit that such as her hobbies etc. because that's

how she can manage her family and work life.

Respondent F

You can only make balance in both, when you learn how to ignore things. You can create a good balance when you learn this. So, compromise is the other name of the balance between these lives.

Respondent G

Time management

The data revealed that respondents also adopted the strategy of managing time to attain the WFLB. Since the commuting time was excluded from their daily life routines women had more time in the Covid-19 to spend on their roles of either the work life or the family life. Moreover, some teachers also utilized the gap between their two classes in performing any other responsibility of family life. Following were the responses of the respondents regarding the management of time:

First of all, my traveling time was eliminated. Since I was working from home. And I didn't feel that tired! And I easily delivered the lectures and with that, I gave time to my family as well. So, if my class was in the morning and the next class would be after a 3 hours gap... Then I would give that time to my family... It was easy.

Respondent F

When I was working, I had a four hour gap after my first class. I would utilize that gap of four hours in something like cooking, or calling someone.

Respondent M

So, as per the data, fifty percent married working women adopted this strategy to attain the WFLB.

Seeking support from family

According to the data, respondents tried to attain the WFLB by seeking support from their families. They have given a lot of importance to the family's support. Moreover, the family members were spending more time with each other, their bond grew stronger due to which the respondents were happy and were able to attain the WFLB. In this theme, the data revealed that respondents believed that family support is crucial for the WFLB. Following are the responses of the respondents regarding this strategy:

In my opinion, the support of the family is required for a woman to achieve balance in this. Moreover, if I am content, and I am happy then this also indicates the WFLB. I also think that health also plays a major role in this balance. So, if a person has good health then he or she can achieve the WFLB.

Respondent E

In my opinion, females cannot balance work and family if their family isn't supportive, especially husbands. My husband always supported me whether it was in Pakistan or abroad.

Respondent M

Yes, I would like to add that if family members are together then together they can handle anything and they can balance anything out. So, to keep a balance between these two lives family members should have strong bonds

and attachment with each other! They should be cooperative and helpful.

Respondent F

I wanted the online studies to continue because in that way I could give more time to home for ladies because if you step out of the house then you cannot give proper attention to home.

Respondent M

According to the data, 75% of married working women sought support from the familial bond as a coping strategy to cope with the challenges faced in attaining the WFLB.

Seeking support from organization

The data reveals that women sought support from their organizations which was even given to them by their organizations and it helped them to attain the WFLB. The support from the university was in the form of leniency and training to use the technology. A respondent explained organizational support from her university as:

University and department were very supportive in every way. The department did not pressurize me to follow the time table. There wasn't any compulsion to show for the classes. I could conduct classes as per my availability and feasibility. They showed leniency in this regard. And the university had training for the teachers who would face problems in shifting to the online mode of teaching.

Respondent I

The respondent mentioned that her organization and department allowed her to conduct the

classes according to her feasibility rather than to conduct them at the allotted time.

There was no pressure from my organization so there was nothing difficult. They sent us guidance videos regarding the tools that we had to use. They were quite supportive.

Respondent F

This respondent added that the university even provided them training which allowed her to be able to cope with the technological issues.

They didn't cross check much because it was on us to manage the time accordingly. They didn't make any hard and fast rules that we had to follow. So, they did support us well. Since the main target was to teach the students.

Respondent J

This respondent also supported the claims of the other respondents by commenting on the organizational support as a coping strategy. So, eleven out of twelve women agreed with organizational support as a positive factor for them to adopt as a coping strategy.

Religiosity

The data revealed that some of the respondents adopted religiosity as their coping strategy. The religious beliefs would give the respondent an emotional support as well as reaffirming their faith. This allowed the women to cope with the psychological stress as well as the fear and anxiety caused by the Covid-19 situation. One of the respondents explains it as:

I kept asking people for special prayers, I would check the predictions of the fortune tellers, but most of all I

was able to cope up with that whole time due to my religious beliefs and by connecting more to my religion. I then counseled myself and told myself that if I keep getting scared of this thought then I will not be able to survive. I told myself that death was inevitable; people die of a lot of other diseases so why am I treating COVID any different? With this thought, I stopped treating COVID as a different thing and tried to get used to it because it had come.

Respondent L

I kept myself busy with the religious beliefs and thoughts in order to not panic as well as to avoid any sort of unwanted stress.

Respondent J

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the current research were categorized according to the mentioned objectives. The first objective highlighted the understanding of WFLB among women under two categories. These included the WFLB as the absence of role conflict and the WFLB as satisfaction. In WFLB as the absence of role conflict, most of the women identified the concept of WFLB as the balance between the two life domains i.e. the work life and the family life. They recognized that their equal engagement in all their life roles would help them attain balance. This further showed that both the life domains have their own set of responsibilities which they had to fulfill on time. This definition according to the respondents is in line with the previous research (Kofodimos, 1993; Marks and MacDermid 1996). Then, the findings also revealed that some of the women associate the WFLB with the sense of satisfaction they achieve

by the accomplishment of the tasks of their lives. The understanding of the concept of the WFLB as satisfaction among women is in correspondence with the definitions of various researchers given in the previous studies (Kirchmeyer, 2000).

The second objective of the research was the challenges faced by women in attaining WFLB. Contradicting the previous literature, the findings revealed that the majority of the women were able to attain the WFLB despite facing challenges in both the work and family roles. Although it was difficult for them to differentiate between roles due to the overlapping of roles and hindrances in the achievement of the WFLB. The challenges were categorized into three domains i.e. the work-life challenges, the family-life challenges and challenges related to the mental well-being of individuals. The challenges that the previous studies presented were few while the current study focused on the challenges in detail. The current study categorized the challenges that were faced by women according to each domain.

The challenges that are categorized under the work domain are; academic incivility, technical challenges, lack of personal space, work inefficiency, time management, and unrealistic expectations of students. These challenges are in line with the challenges that were mentioned in the previous findings. As per Campbell et al (2020), more and more online instructors had to deal with academic incivility by the students in the classroom resulting in a negative effect on academic staff and the other students. Then, the study of Kalsoom (2021) supported the present study's technical challenges and lack of personal space along with the time management issues and the work inefficiency that could be considered as the outcome of the proliferation of role conflict.

The second domain of challenges is family life-related challenges. The challenges of this domain were; unannounced guests, Covid-19-influenced

socialization and gendered prejudices etc. These issues did not have any previous support from the literature and thus were the new findings in the challenges faced by married working women. The data showed that the sudden visit from relatives would put them in an awkward situation because if they avoided them and continued their work then the relatives would really mind it and then stigmatize the respondent with being rude, proud and arrogant. Moreover, some respondents also mentioned that Covid-19 had influenced their children so much that 'quarantine', 'move away', and 'don't hug' were some of the early words spoken by their youngsters. Lastly, gendered prejudice was also an issue faced by married working women because if they were the ones working on laptops and technologies then their elder family members would think that they were wasting their time. It was because she was a woman.

The third domain of challenges was psychological stress. The current study is in accordance with the previous studies, meaning that for some women their mental health improved during the lockdown by spending time with their family members (Peirce et al, 2020; Kalsoom, 2021)) while for some their mental health decreased due to the sudden closure of everything which resulted in depression and stress among them (Platts et al, 2020).

The previous studies majorly focused only on the challenges faced by the women due to which they could not attain the WFLB and there was limited literature about methods of attaining the WFLB during COVID-19. Only a few studies offered some evidence surrounding techniques and strategies that working women would adopt for WFLB. The respondents of the current study showed that despite facing the increased and multiple difficulties in both the work and family life domains they were able to attain the WFLB by adopting the coping strategies. The coping strategies that they adopted to attain the WFLB

were compromising on situations, time management, seeking support from family, seeking support from organizations, and religiosity. Some of these coping strategies are in line with the previous study of Rehman and Roomi (2012) while some can be considered as the new findings in this research topic. Few of the respondents considered compromising in different situations as an important strategy to attain the WFLB. This was a new finding in this research topic because no literature showed the relation of WFLB as the compromise of one's priorities. Time management (Rehman and Roomi, 2012) and seeking support (Adisa et al, 2021) from family are in view of the literature while religiosity does not correspond with the literature and can be considered as the new findings in this research topic.

Women mentioned that they utilized increased self-time that they got due to the suspension of commuting in reflecting upon their strategies to spend a good time with their families and attain a balanced life amid the lockdown. Time management and seeking support from the family was the most common strategy amongst the women to cope with their challenges in attaining WFLB. Findings revealed that women would manage time to be able to spend time with their families which resultantly allowed them to have more familial bonds during the lockdown. Moreover, the findings showed that some women consider the WFLB as the other name for family support. This familial bond allowed them to cope with the challenges and continue to perform their responsibilities. Unlike the culture and norms of Pakistan, with this study, it has come to light that the thinking of men and in-laws has progressed because women claimed that most of them had support from their families in one way or another which lessened their burden a lot. According to the respondents, the women felt that if their families were supportive then they could automatically achieve the WFLB. Religiosity was

another coping strategy found in most of the women through which they survived the hard times during lockdown.

Conclusion

The findings of this research study showed that married working women were affected due to the work from home. It was evident from the analysis of the findings that married teachers of GCU had their understanding of WFLB which was very similar to the definitions of WFLB given by researchers. This research paper revealed three main objectives of the research i.e. to know about the understanding of married working women, to explore the challenges faced by the married working women in attaining the WFLB during the lockdown and the coping strategies they adopted to attain the balance of work life and family life. The study revealed that married working women of GCU had a clear understanding of WFLB. The challenges faced by married working women were work-life challenges, family-life challenges and challenges related to mental well-being. Lastly, the coping strategies adopted by women to cope with the challenges to attain the WFLB were discussed. These included compromising in situations, time management, seeking support from family, seeking support from their organizations, and affiliating themselves with the religion. With the help of these strategies, married working women of GCU overcame all their challenges and attained WFLB during the time of lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Limitations

The researcher encountered some limitations while undertaking this study. The fact that there were so few participants made it more important to be cautious when extrapolating the results. No matter how carefully the results and analysis are taken out, it still makes research less reliable because of the fewer respondents. It would be

advantageous to perform this research on a wider and more detailed scale in order to enable a more thorough analysis of the subject. Moreover, the research could have included quantitative methodology as well.

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