



Women and Work-Life Balance: Investigate the Challenges and Strategies Employed by Women in Balancing Professional and Personal Responsibilities

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71145/rjsp.v3i2.289>

Abstract

The research examines how women in Pakistan experience managing their professional and personal responsibilities. The workforce participation growth of women has made work-life balance (WLB) challenges more urgent because of cultural norms and economic realities without sufficient organizational support. A qualitative methodological framework combined with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) guides this research which examines eleven professional women employed in education, healthcare, business along with IT fields. The research analyzes challenges including physical exhaustion and time limitations along with societal norms and rigid workplace regulations through comprehensive semi-structured interview analysis. Through the research participants demonstrate different ways they manage difficulties which include both effective time organization and seeking social help together with personal care practices and flexible work schedule requests. The investigation analyzes work-life balance challenges through five primary themes that include Work-Life Balance Struggles, Coping Mechanisms and Strategies, Socio-Cultural and Economic Influences, Personal and Professional Role Conflict, and Workplace Environment and Policy Challenges. Through detailed analysis of women's daily experiences this research enhances current knowledge about work-life balance while proposing reforms that support inclusive workplace policies and promote shared domestic responsibilities.

Keywords: Work Life Balance, Women, IPA, Professional and Personal Responsibilities

Introduction

The demand to achieve work-life balance (WLB) continues to grow significantly across today's professional environment especially because women must handle their career alongside family responsibilities. Women joining the workforce create more complex challenges to fulfill their work requirements alongside their family responsibilities. Society along with cultural frameworks as well as institutional requirements create extra challenges for women due to their traditional domestic responsibility allocation. Many people especially women face considerable challenges in their attempt to maintain equilibrium between job duties and home responsibilities in the present era. Modern society has elevated the significance of work-life balance (WLB) since women have grown more prevalent and persistent in the workforce over the last few decades. Traditional gender roles persist in creating specific barriers that affect women because they primarily handle household childcare responsibilities (Riaz, 2021). The pervasive phenomena of dual-family-childcare duties has brought researchers to investigate female strategies for handling work and domestic roles. Recent research investigates the methods that women utilize to handle their work-family conflict challenges following an earlier emphasis on the negative consequences of work-family conflict (Bakar 2024, Tushabe et al. 2025). This review examines the professional-personal conflicts women encounter while discussing their successful solutions for managing those challenges. This review incorporates

organizational support systems with societal demands and workload techniques and individual adjustment techniques to explain the methods through which employees can reach work-life balance while drawing data from contemporary research in the field.

Challenges in Achieving Work-Life Balance

Women deal with major obstacles that block their ability to reach an acceptable work-life balance. Societal norms create a major obstacle for women because they pressure them to focus on childcare duties before everything else. Society imposes an unbalanced demand on female workers because they must balance employment roles with primary domestic duties thus creating ongoing tension between career needs and caregiving duties. Three distinct influences individual traits, organizational components and social cultural regulations create work-life experiences while various aspects including gender identity and employee age alongside job responsibilities and familial obligations determine the effectiveness of work-life equilibrium (Shockley et al., 2017; Byron, 2005). The establishment of work-life balance creates multiple benefits for individuals according to research findings which demonstrate higher job satisfaction and decreased stress alongside improved health outcomes and better overall well-being (Allen et al., 2000; Grzywacz & Bass 2003). Greater employee engagement and productivity along with higher retention rates and improved organizational reputation and performance are benefits that firms receive from establishing work-life balance initiatives (Kossek et al., 2011; Allen et al., 2013). Women encounter additional difficulties caused by heavy professional workloads inside their working environment. Modern technology and expanded working hours together with complex professional tasks create substantial pressure for women to perform exceptionally well in both their personal and professional responsibilities (Shi, Chen, & Cheung, 2023). Mental and physical well-being usually suffer detriment when women try to satisfy work requirements along with maintaining their personal duties. Work-life balance recognition and resolution at the workplace serves as an essential requirement to enhance worker well-being and productivity in modern shifting work environments.

Strategies Employed by Women to Balance Work and Life

Strategies Employed by Women to Balance Work and Life Women encounter substantial obstacles in workplace success yet they utilize numerous effective techniques to stabilize their professional and home-oriented duties. Telecommuting together with flexible work hours and job-sharing constitute effective time and responsibility management strategies for women in the workforce (Mazaheri et al., 2023). A proven method for work-life balance success includes men taking part in household tasks alongside their partners. The modern shift in gender social norms enables fathers to join mothers in caring tasks which eases some of the stress women face from dual responsibilities between employment and domestic life (Shi, Chen, & Cheung, 2023). Furthermore, supportive workplace cultures are critical in helping women attain a balance between their professional and personal lives.

Cultural and Societal Influences on Work-Life Balance Strategies

Women base their work-life balance strategies on cultural values combined with social beliefs that exist in their communities. Women in traditional patriarchal societies demonstrate lower rates of help-seeking as well as the utilization of flexible working arrangements because they fear social disapproval. The traditional social norms throughout Pakistan block females from pursuing education and increasing their professional careers which demonstrate how cultural values create gender inequality (Khan, 2020).

According to Cabeza-García et al. (2019) cultural norms create restrictions which prevent women from achieving control of their work-life balance decisions which results in negative impacts on both their wellbeing and workplace advancement.

The Impact of Work-Life Balance on Career Advancement

The Impact of Work-Life Balance on Career Advancement Women experience noticeable effects on career development together with lifetime evaluations because of how they

understand and approach their professional work. Work-life balance strategies which women deploy serve dual purposes of promoting their mental wellness while facilitating their career development. Career advancement represents the visible signs of employee success which include both financial benefits and professional recognition as defined by Malhotra and Singh (2016). Studies reveal that achieving balance between professional activities and personal commitments remains a continuous mission for workplace employees regardless of gender while time overlap between domains presents a challenge (Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent, & Alegre, 2016).

Work-life balance remains a critical issue for female workers from different fields who face excessive demands from long working hours combined with dual-income financial responsibilities. Research has shown that women in under-represented professions also experience challenges with WLB and career advancement, such as medical (Anuradha & Pandey, 2016); academia (Neale-McFall, Eckart, Hermann, Haskins, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2018); and engineering (Singh, Zhang, Wan, & Fouad, 2018)

Current study

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore the challenges women face in balancing their professional responsibilities with personal and familial responsibilities, and to discover the strategies they employ to accomplish these dual roles. As societal expectations and executive demands continue to evolve, many women experience insistent struggles in attaining a maintainable work-life balance. This study aims to gain deeper understandings into women's lived experiences across various professional backgrounds, with a focus on recognizing recurring patterns of struggle, coping mechanisms, and the support structures that influence their ability to maintain balance. By taking rich, descriptive data through participant stories, this research proposes to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the everyday realities women encounter and to support the expansion of practical, context-specific explanations that can notify workplace strategies and practices.

The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the subjective experiences of women, exploring how they make sense of their work-life balance struggles and recognize ways to manage. This analysis is based on interviews with women who providing rich understandings into their daily challenges and coping mechanisms.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To explore the challenges faced by women in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.
2. To identify the strategies and coping mechanisms women use to attain work-life balance, and to examine the influence of these approaches on their mental, emotional, and physical well-being.
3. To examine how socio-cultural, economic, and organizational factors influence women's capability to manage work and family roles.
4. To gain deep insight into the lived experiences of women, highlighting their personal narratives, reflections, and perceptions related to balancing work and life, and to offer recommendations for forming more supportive environments.

Methodology

Setting

Research took place across different cities in Pakistan by seeking participants from multiple professional settings. The interviews took place at settings chosen by the participants either at their home spaces or workplace or through online platforms to guarantee participant comfort and maintain confidentiality. Participants could choose between English and Urdu when

speaking during interviews based on their preference. Interviews examined the participant's dual care and work responsibilities. All interview procedures adhered to ethical protocols where privacy and consent measures were strictly maintained. Intense privacy limitations prevent the release of complete interview texts to the public domain.

Participants

The research used purposive sampling to obtain participants. The research enrolled eleven adult women with ages ranged from 25 to 45 years. The participants maintained full-time professional positions together with their responsibilities at home. Women with serious mental health problems and those unwilling to discuss their experiences thoroughly were not included in the study. Research participants consented to participation and received confidentiality protections during the complete duration of the study. Participants from education, business administration, healthcare, IT and various other fields demonstrated how women across diverse occupations approach work-life balance. The sample included participants with diverse marital backgrounds and educational achievements who came from different locations which demonstrated distinct challenges and approaches that woman use in their work-life balance management.

Demographic Information of the Participants

The table below presents the demographic information of the participants:

Participant	Age	Education	Marital Status	City/Culture	Profession
1	30	M.Phil.	Married	Lahore	School Teacher
2	32	B.Ed.	Married	Gujrat	Private School Teacher
3	29	M.B.A.	Married	Islamabad	HR Manager
4	35	M.Phil.	Married	Gujrat	Lecturer
5	28	B.S.	Unmarried	Lalamusa	Freelancer
6	33	M.Sc.	Married	Gujranwala	Healthcare Admin
7	31	MBA	Married	Lahore	Bank Officer
8	26	BBA.	Unmarried	Gujrat	Small Business Owner
9	34	M.Ed.	Married	Gujrat	Education Consultant
10	42	PhD	Married	Multan	University Professor
11	27	B.S.	Unmarried	Lahore	IT Specialist

Data Collection

The research data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews. Each interview took place separately from other participants either through face-to-face meetings or video calls based on participant scheduling choices. The research interview sessions ran from 45 minutes to 1 full hour. For investigating participants' management of work-life responsibilities researchers utilized an open-ended inquiry. The interview assessment directed its inquiries toward the difficulties women encounter alongside their stress management solutions and their established strategies for achieving work-life integration. The research purpose was explained to participant's right before interviews while obtaining their consent. The researcher's audio-recorded all interviews while obtaining verbatim transcriptions to maintain both data accuracy and research data integrity.

Data Analysis

Researchers utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to evaluate semi-structured interview data because this method enables the study of how people understand their personal as well as social experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2014). IPA functions well to

investigate participant experiences because it investigates the personal meanings they connect to their lived experiences (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

Reading each interview transcript multiple times during stage one allowed the researcher to get to know its contents. The researchers used this stage to develop a deep familiarity with participant experiences because IPA strongly depends on the researcher's active interpretation of the data according to Larkin, Watts, & Clifton (2006). The researcher recognized key themes by studying important lines from the transcripts for evidence representing participants' work-life apprenticeship experiences. After the researcher identified initial themes, he organized them to discover superordinate themes which captured essential patterns among participants. Data analysis proceeded through repeated review of themes while comparing them to original participant expressions to stay true to actual participant accounts. Researchers evaluated and discussed the final theme collection in relation to their research objectives to explore in detail how women handle their work-life balance difficulties along with their adaptation strategies.

Results

The study findings resulting from IPA analysis of interview responses are described in this section. The research themes evolve from direct participant encounters regarding women and work life balance by exploring the challenges and strategies in balancing personal and professional responsibilities. This study organizes its outcomes across five superordinate themes that include supporting evidence from verbatim participant quotes.

Superordinate Theme 1: Work-Life Balance Struggles

Subtheme 1: Mental and Physical Toll

A frequent theme across the interviews was the mental and physical strain caused by attempting to balance professional responsibilities with family and personal life. Several female respondents described their experience with physical exhaustion as well as mental burnout from performing different roles in their lives. The participant expressed her situation with these exact words: "I feel like I'm always running from one thing to another, never having a moment for myself. By the end of the day, I'm completely drained, mentally and physically." (Interview 3). You end the day entirely exhausted in your mental state and physical capabilities according to the interviewee. The quoted comment illustrates a universal experience of excessive fatigue women develop when they struggle to maintain work-life equilibrium. One interviewee expressed "I'm exhausted... I don't know how to manage both without feeling like I'm going to collapse." (Interview 6). The ongoing movement between professional and familial duties leads to universal physical burnout among women. Participants experienced stress beyond task control because they needed to handle emotional and responsibility-related demands too. People engaging in research indicated that balancing work with home make their mental health suffer which resulted in emotional fatigue that affected their well-being. The interview subject expressed feelings of anxiety because work-life conflict made her worry about letting people down while failing to attend both job duties and personal life duties. "I'm always anxious about dropping the ball, about not being able to give enough attention to both sides of my life." (Interview 9). Women experienced elevated anxiety levels and rising stress related to continuous work pressure that ultimately affected their mental stability and life performance.

Subtheme 2: Time Scarcity and Overload

One substantial challenge emerged from limited time availability. Most participants expressed their belief that their professional responsibilities collided with personal life needs because their available time was insufficient. According to Participant they experience a continuous sense of running out of available time. "It feels like I'm constantly running out of time. There's never enough time for me to just stop and breathe, let alone focus on things I enjoy." (Interview 5). The shortage of time prevents me from stopping my activities to catch my breath while blocking off space for pleasure.

According to another participant it was their daily routine to stay busy trying to handle everything between work and family responsibilities and maintaining their household activities. “I’m always on the go, trying to manage my work, kids, and household. It never ends.” (Interview 9). The statements capture women's ongoing experience of time pressure created by multiple obligations which they consider as finite resources. Bharathi & Mala (2016) discovered that time-shortage issues function as major obstacles for women who aim to combine their career duties with family commitments because intense work hours and challenging roles consume available time. The experience of time pressure intensified because of inflexible work arrangements at their workplace. Women experienced inner conflict because they had to maintain their professional position but still meet family responsibilities. The priority conflict created feelings of guilt alongside inadequacy because women experienced difficulties in acting on their multiple roles simultaneously.

Subtheme 3: Workplace Flexibility and Support

About a majority of women faced major challenges in work-life balance because of their unavailable flexible work schedule options. The workplace lacked mechanisms which supported employees' family requirements according to numerous participants. A participant said that improved flexibility at work would enable her to achieve better control over her time. The ability to balance work responsibilities and family time became limited because I had to avoid serious commitments due to job requirements which left me without rest and connection with my children. “If my job were more flexible, I would feel much more in control of my time. I could actually spend more time with my children or take a moment for myself without worrying about work.” (Interview 7). The statement demonstrates why flexible work options play an essential role in helping women manage their career along with personal responsibilities. Flexible work arrangements produce positive effects on work-life balance according to Chung & van der Lippe (2020) in their study. The workers experienced strong feelings of aggravation against the rigid work environment. The participant expressed how workplace options for home work or flexible schedules would enable greater work-life balance. My situation does not permit me to attempt different options for work. “If I could work from home or have flexible hours, I’d feel so much more well-adjusted. But that’s not an option for me.” (Interview 8). Work-life sustainability faced significant challenges because organizations did not implement flexible work arrangements. The lack of supportive workplace policies regarding paid leave alongside remote work opportunities and flexible schedules led workers to experience growing frustration. The combination of work demands at organizations created added challenges because these entities failed to understand women's personal responsibilities while placing intensive expectations on them.

Superordinate Theme 2: Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

Subtheme 1: Time Management and Prioritization

The research participants demonstrated various methods to deal with their work-life balance problems despite strong barriers to successful implementation. The participants frequently used time management as their main method to manage stress. Many women addressed the struggle by establishing firm time schedules which helped them manage their various duties. The participant stated that she must schedule everything from work through family time to personal time. The absence of an entry on your scheduling system means the task will not occur. Personal scheduling stands as the sole approach to achieve organization in life. Participant explained, “I have to plan everything work, family time, even time for myself. If it’s not on the plan, it doesn’t happen. It’s the only way to stay organized.” (Interview 8). Research reveals that established scheduling combined with ranking workplace requirements allows women to handle their professional duties and home responsibilities effectively (Oladejo, 2021).

The management philosophy demonstrates the need for systems and schedules which allow people to handle their occupational and family duties. Time management proved necessary

among a significant number of participants. Through Time blocking participants gained effective life organization skills which allowed them to establish priorities so they could stay in control of their multifaceted responsibilities. Another participant explained how they learned to concentrate on essential tasks “I’ve learned to concentrate on what matters most. If I don’t have time for everything, I focus on what needs to be done first and let other things go.” (Interview 4). Women achieve better time management control through the practice of choosing specific priority tasks.

Subtheme 2: Seeking Support from Others

Social support served as a primary method for women dealing with their work-life balance obstacles. Women interviewed about their work-life challenges pointed out that their spouses together with family members and friends performed essential roles to reduce their load. My husband provides such strong household support that I could not balance work alongside my children’s responsibilities. Participant shared, “Without my husband’s help at home, I wouldn’t be able to manage both work and the kids. It’s a partnership, and we share everything.” (Interview 6). The theme highlights the importance of joint duty sharing as women could commit time either toward their careers or individual requirements. A meta-analysis from French et al, (2018) confirmed that work and home social support systems create dual benefits which lower work-family tension and improve overall wellness symptoms such as job contentment and emotional health. Rarely study participants described how relatives and friends assisted them in addition to their basic support system. Female employees regarded their informal support network as a fundamental resource which enabled them to fulfill multiple responsibilities.

Subtheme 3: Workplace Flexibility as a Lifesaver

Workplace flexibility emerged as a vital support system when offered at the workplace. Women experienced greater schedule control after utilizing flexibility options in work such as remote work and adjustable hours. One participant explained that working from home provides better control for handling children while fulfilling her work commitments. The workplace flexibility allows participants to better manage their children and job while eliminating both commuting hassles and physical absence from their homes. Participant said, “When I can work from home, I can manage my children and my job better. It gives me more flexibility and takes away the stress of commuting and being away from home.” (Interview 10). Worksites that provide flexible settings serve as vital resources for women who want to maintain balance between their occupational and personal duties. Most women dealing with time constraints without access to flexible arrangements expressed dissatisfaction alongside their demand for adaptable workplace arrangements. The surveyed women pointed out that improved flexible work policies would produce substantial benefits toward their successful role management.

Subtheme 4: Emphasizing Self-Care and Boundaries

The importance of self-care emerged as a vital factor for participants to achieve equilibrium. The practice of exercise together with hobbies and personal time emerged as vital components that women used to avoid burnout and restore themselves. The participant emphasized the requirement to schedule personal care time. I require breaks through activities such as walking and book reading to empty my thoughts. Participant stated, “It’s vital to make time for myself. Even if it’s just a walk or reading a book, I need that time to clear my head. Otherwise, I’ll burn out.” (Interview 2). Personal boundaries served as a fundamental approach for women to manage their professional and personal lives. Several women set specific time constraints regarding their working hours and household tasks to maintain personal care activities.

Superordinate Theme 3: Socio-Cultural and Economic Influences

Subtheme 1: Economic Pressures

The major element pushing against work-life balance came from economic circumstances according to most participants. Those who participated indicated they needed to choose

demanding work and extend their workday due to financial requirements. As Participant described she needs to maintain full-time work due to her family's dependence on her salary. The situation demands no opportunity for relaxation. Participant explained, "I have to keep working at full capacity because we depend on my income. There's no room for slowing down." (Interview 10). Through financial necessity many women found it impossible to take time off work or cut their hours when their work personal life equilibrium reached an unsustainable point.

Subtheme 2: Cultural Expectations and Gender Roles

Work-life balance received influence from cultural norms which combined with gender-specific expectations. The women interviewed revealed how cultural beliefs demanded them to serve as primary homemaker duties thus increasing their stress from workplace management and domestic duties. According to Participant the expectation persists that she should handle all responsibilities within the home. The strain on women's bodies continues to tire them down daily without others understanding their situation. Participant said, "There's always this expectation that I should be the one handling everything at home. It's exhausting, and no one seems to understand the tension it causes." (Interview 8). Societal expectations forced many women between these two roles which made them confident they were failing in some capacity and developed feelings of being insufficient. Participants observed the widespread social attitude that assigns main household responsibility to working women. A study participant stated that women face an unconscious social requirement to care for their families without making any negative statements about their situation. "There's this unspoken rule that women should be able to handle both work and home without any complaints." (Interview 7). The deeply embedded social rules regarding gender roles established intense both psychological and societal expectations that forced women to feel incompetent when they missed their mark at home and at work.

Subtheme 3: Cultural Stigma around Seeking Help

Women participants revealed how judgment fell upon them whenever they required help with housework or requested adaptable work plans. A participant reported that asking for help seems to carry a social stigma which creates doubts about women's ability to be mothers and women. Participant's regard anyone who seeks assistance rather than tackling everything alone as a failure concerning femininity and motherhood. Participant said, "There's this stigma that if you ask for help, you're not a good woman or a good mother. People judge you for not doing it all on your own." (Interview 10). A strong cultural mindset placed added additional stress to women who sought assistance because they received negative reactions from others (Chung, 2020).

Superordinate Theme 4: Personal and Professional Role Conflict

This theme captures the conflict women face trying to serve their personal and occupational responsibilities and juggling both at the same time. A good number of women reported feeling as though they were perpetually pulled in two directions trying to balance the two worlds.

Subtheme 1: Dual Responsibility Overload

Another one of the broader themes was the simultaneous undertaking of the two domains and the work-related roles which were referred to as overbearing. One participant said, "It feels like no matter how much I do, there's always something else to take care of either work or home. It's exhausting." (Interview 4)

Subtheme 2: Guilt and Inadequacy

Some women reported a sense of remorse when one role or responsibility was not fulfilled as expected. "I feel like I'm always failing at one thing. Either I'm not giving enough time to my family, or I'm not doing enough at work." (Interview 8). This depicts a cyclic struggle and the women turn out to be unendingly bound by expectations and in this case, it appears that women do take on the burden of societal expectations resulting in diminished self-worth and self-confidence (Sarwar I, 2023).

Superordinate Theme 5: Workplace Environment and Policy Challenges

This theme explores the factors at the workplace and organizational level that prevent or support women from improving work-life balance.

Subtheme 1: Lack of Workplace Flexibility

This was accompanied by anger from many participants about how rigid their workplaces were. Participant shared, “If I could work from home or have flexible hours, I’d feel so much more balanced. But that’s not an option for me.” (Interview 8). Lack of workable arrangements is one of the largest obstacles in achieving sustainable work-life balance.

Subtheme 2: Inadequate Organizational Support

A shortcoming in organizational support more broadly, such as paid leave or the ability to adjust work hours was also a significant complaint. Participant responded that my boss is not supportive with working moms. Offer me no addition time off or help and I get left to struggle between work and home. “My employer doesn’t provide any support for working mothers. I get no extra time off or help, so I end up feeling stuck between my job and home.” (Interview 7) This void of help made it even harder for women to balance what they did without some outsiders aiding in the scheme. Important workplace policies for helping women balance careers and family include paid family leave, flexible scheduling, and supportive working conditions (Boushey & Glynn 2012).

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of women as they balance professional and personal responsibilities, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the rich data from participants' verbatim responses. Analysis produced five dominant themes which provided essential insights about women's multifaceted work-life equilibrium challenges together with their adaptation methods and the social cultural economic elements impacting their experiences.

Work-Life Balance Struggles

All the participants shared a deep and extensive experience of physical and mental exhaustion from handling various commitments during the interview process. Interviewee 3 stated “*I feel like I’m always running from one thing to another, never having a moment for myself. By the end of the day, I’m completely drained, mentally and physically.*” The challenging state of exhaustion which numerous women encounter in their efforts to maintain their work and personal responsibilities became evident through this finding. Similarly, Interviewee 6 shared, “*I’m exhausted... I don’t know how to manage both without feeling like I’m going to collapse.*” Mental together with physical exhaustion presents itself as a primary difficulty which affects most women in professional work environments and demonstrates substantial damage to their total wellness. These findings align with those by Naz et al. (2017) who discovered that Pakistani women develop burnout symptoms because they need to manage both their household and workplace responsibilities. Professional women working in STEM fields within Nigeria experience increased stress together with degraded occupational health because of conflicts between their work and family responsibilities according to Uzoigwe et al. (2016). The study participants identified lack of time as their top concern. According to Interviewee 5 time lacks sufficiency so she cannot find moments for relaxation nor engagement in pleasurable activities. Participant stated, “*There’s never enough time for me to just stop and breathe, let alone focus on things I enjoy.*” The participants repeatedly discussed time as a scarce commodity that created difficulties for them when trying to handle their professional responsibilities and maintain family commitments as well as personal activities. Women in inflexible work settings particularly experienced this phenomenon since their workplaces did not offer enough flexibility. A more flexible work environment would let Interviewee 7 feel

higher control over her time allocation. Participant shared, *"If my job were more flexible, I would feel much more in control of my time."* Many participants identified lack of flexible work hours as a major obstacle to creating work-life balance while performing dual roles because efficient work policies must support women in both domains of life. The findings of Bharathi and Mala (2016) support the results that time-related challenges create major obstacles for Indian IT women when they try to balance their professional and personal roles.

Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

Many respondents employed different coping strategies that allowed them to handle their work-life balance difficulties successfully despite facing important obstacles. Participants found time management together with setting priorities to be essential tools for handling work-related and domestic responsibilities. According to Interviewee 8 scheduling everything includes her work responsibilities and family commitments as well as personal time needs. Participant explained, *"I have to plan everything work, family time, even time for myself. If it's not on the plan, it doesn't happen."* Any task must appear on the calendar to be executed. Based on his experience Interviewee 4 learned to prioritize essential activities because he believes this is essential for managing both professional and personal demands. When I cannot complete all tasks, I start with what must be done right away while putting aside the rest. *"I've learned to focus on what matters most. If I don't have time for everything, I focus on what needs to be done first and let other things go."* Many participants reduced work pressure through strategic time and resource planning which involved time-blocking techniques. Female academics in Nigeria have shown that they utilize structured scheduling along with task prioritization as effective strategies to handle work-family responsibilities according to Oladejo (2021). Many individuals found strength by asking for help from people they loved and family members during challenging times. Participating in the study through Interviewee 6 noted that her home responsibilities would be impossible without her husband stepping in to help handle both work and child-related duties. *"Without my husband's help at home, I wouldn't be able to manage both work and the kids. It's a partnership, and we share everything."* Both partners form a joint alliance that involves sharing all matters. Female academics discovered that shared responsibility with family members and spouses helped them handle their work-related and personal obligations. Social support systems have been proven vital in reducing work-family conflicts for professional women according to existing research. The meta-analysis by French et al. (2018) proved that social support from both professional environments and domestic spheres helps decrease work-family conflicts and improves employee well-being particularly job satisfaction and mental health outcomes.

Flexible work arrangements provided significant benefits to employees when they became accessible. Interviewee 10 explained that working from home lets them handle work duties and childcare needs adequately. The flexibility enables me to handle my children better with reduced commuting-related stress and presence outside my home. According to participant *"When I can work from home, I can manage my children and my job better. It gives me more flexibility and takes away the stress of commuting and being away from home."* The Stanford University study (June 2024) demonstrated that workers who split their time between office and remote duties kept identical productivity metrics compared to absolute office staff along with reduced employee turnover numbers indicating flexible arrangements help workers reduce their work strain.

Participants mentioned self-care practices as requirements which enable both physical and mental well-being. For Interviewee 2 having dedicated self-care time remains absolutely vital. I need brief moments alone to clear my mind whether through walking or reading books because these activities help me reset. *"It's essential to make time for myself. Even if it's just a walk or reading a book, I need that time to clear my head. Otherwise, I'll burn out."* Most respondents agreed that establishing personal limits remained essential to achieve both good

work-life separation and stop burnout occurrences in their lives. Academics can manage university demands more effectively by creating specific limits between their educational roles and personal lives (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016).

Socio-Cultural and Economic Influences

The economic constraints which participants faced made it difficult for them to work at slower paces or shorten their working hours. Interviewee 10 expressed the need to maintain full-time operations because their household survival depends on their wages. The situation demands continued high-speed operation without any possibility of decreased speed. As Participant explained, *"I have to keep working at full capacity because we depend on my income. There's no room for slowing down."* Women stayed in their high-demand work positions because financial needs were prevalent but these jobs negatively affected their overall health. Financial obligations kept women stuck in their work roles because they had to maintain full employment even at the cost of self-care. According to Rajabi-Gilan et al. (2025), working women from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to experience more work-family conflict (WFC) thus leading to diminished quality of life. Cultural norms dictating gender-based duties appeared throughout the research data. Each day brings a social requirement for me to manage household responsibilities by myself according to Interviewee 8 *"There's always this expectation that I should be the one handling everything at home. It's exhausting, and no one seems to understand the tension it causes."* The pressure becomes tired-making because people fail to recognize the full extent of this burden. Most women experienced cultural pressure to lead home care responsibilities thus creating additional work-life conflict hurdles. Individuals within this culture often felt despair because women perceived themselves as unable to properly execute their domestic and professional obligations. Women face hidden demands to tackle workplace and domestic responsibilities smoothly according to Interviewee 7 *"There's this unspoken rule that women should be able to handle both work and home without any complaints."* The pressure women face from their surroundings leads to feelings of guilt which creates obstacles for them to accomplish their responsibilities at home and work. Hussain et al. (2015) demonstrate how gender stereotyping in Pakistan establishes a belief among people that women hold sole responsibility for household work which obstructs work-life balance.

Study participants identified a negative social attitude toward getting help as a barrier for themselves and others. According to Interviewee 10 *"There's this stigma that if you ask for help, you're not a good woman or a good mother. People judge you for not doing it all on your own."* People believe that seeking help portrays an individual as an inferior woman or mother. Court of public opinion penalizes women when they fail to handle everything without assistance. Women bear significant stress when faced with cultural demands to handle all responsibilities independently which makes their work-life balance situation even more difficult. The findings of Chung (2020) demonstrate flexibility stigma exists as a gender-affected form of discrimination where men tend to discriminate against flexible jobs but women who are mothers experience the most stigma.

Personal and Professional Role Conflict

The participants in this study described the overwhelming experience of handling their professional responsibilities along with their domestic duties. Interviewee 4 explained her feelings through the statement *"No matter how much I do, there's always something else to take care of either work or home. It's exhausting."* Through their continuous efforts to maintain balance these women frequently ended up feeling both incompetent and insufficient. Interviewee 8 shared the experience of permanent failure in one aspect of her life. I keep doubting myself since I dedicate inadequate time to my family along with limited work assignments. *"I feel like I'm always failing at one thing. Either I'm not giving enough time to my family, or I'm not doing enough at work."* Work-family conflict among women frequently causes emotional distress and burnout because they develop feelings of inadequacy. Women

commonly experience high levels of stress according to Duxbury and Higgins (2003) as work and family responsibilities generate work-life balance deterioration.

Workplace Environment and Policy Challenges

Almost many interviewed women complained about the insufficient flexibility offered in their workplaces. Interviewee 8 explained that workplace flexibility through remote work solutions or adaptable hour scheduling would improve their overall life balance. Participant said, *“If I could work from home or have flexible hours, I’d feel so much more balanced.”* The absence of adaptable work arrangements proved to be an important obstacle for work-life balance especially among women who manage multiple responsibilities. The effective implementation of workplace policies including paid family leave and flexible scheduling at supportive workplaces reveals its importance for women to balance work with home responsibilities while maintaining their position in the labor force (Boushey & Glynn, 2012).

Conclusion

The research examined professional women in Pakistan while exploring how they handle the difficult process of managing their work demands and household duties. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) revealed the major physical, emotional and psychological pressures women face when they try to achieve their professional and family roles. Through analysis five essential superordinate themes emerged to describe women's enduring challenges at work and at home including challenges related to work-life balance as well as coping methods and societal cultural and economic factors and occupational and personal life-role conflicts and workplace policy and environment-related barriers.

Women adopted time management skills along with social networks and self-care routines as their main method to manage stress yet they continued to face stress because of structural workplace rules and rigid gender norms together with financial pressures as well as cultural constraints about obtaining support. Data shows that flexible organizations together with changing gender roles must join with workplace policies to enhance female employees' work-life equilibrium. Research establishes the immediate requirement to develop tailored solutions at organizational and societal levels which will reduce work-life pressure experienced by women.

Sustainable work-life harmony for women can be achieved through flexible workplace solutions and equitable domestic lifeguards besides cultural rehabilitation of help request avoidance beliefs. These findings from genuine women's voices enhance practical workplace knowledge to develop both more sensitive workplace approaches and applicable policies and wider social initiatives. Overall, the findings underscore the need for systemic changes in workplace policies and societal norms to better support women in balancing their roles effectively.

Limitations and Future Directions

Studying the life experiences of working women who manage work-life balance showed analytical constraints because this investigation focused on specific regions of Pakistan. The research sample included participants from Pakistan's regional locations yet the study results lack applicability across all female populations from various cultural settings and organizational environments. According to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis the main objective lies in deep examination rather than broad coverage thus this study focused on intimate understanding of individual experiences instead of achieving general results. When evaluating result applicability, the readers should understand the study area limitations.

The study limitations materialize from using self-reported data which researchers collected through semi-structured interviews. Participants could have unknowingly or knowingly

adjusted their answers during expressive interviews since they experienced social pressures or kept personal feelings hidden. The study participants potentially modified their reports on sensitive issues because of personal reservations and emotional responses which might have affected the reliability of their confirmations. The various educational and occupational backgrounds of participants were outweighed by their shared socioeconomic and cultural social standing. Insufficient diversity in studied dimensions might have limited the research by eliminating distinctive views about work-life harmony among female respondents who experienced different life situations.

Future research needs to expand its survey participant base to include women from diverse demographic groups and careers since this approach would deliver rich findings about how women face their work-life challenges in multiple ways. Longitudinal research should study how work-life challenges and coping mechanisms transform over time especially as women navigate life transitions including marriage and childbirth and professional advancements. Finally, future studies may benefit from incorporating multiple perspectives, including those of spouses, employers, or colleagues, to develop a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing women's work-life balance. Such research could contribute to more informed and culturally sensitive policies, workplace practices, and support mechanisms aimed at enhancing the well-being and professional engagement of women

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