

Working Mothers at the Crossroads – Work Family Conflict and Childcare

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ABSTRACT

Work and family interface has been regarded as one of the most studied social science topics for the past several decades. The initial studies viewed work and family from the prospective of segmentation theory, that regarded work and family as two completely different spheres of one's life and run by their own rules. However, the phenomenon which created the necessity of interdisciplinary study of these work and family is the entry of women in the workforce after large scale industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s. A substantial number of educated women began to enter to the workforce, which was basically dominated by men since the beginning of civilisation. This phenomenon completely altered the very established social definition of mothers, as the caretakers and fathers, as the bread earners of the family. There is a major concern in organisations regarding work–life balance, specially for women and also its impact on childcare. The work–family conflict gets affected by multiple variables and the paper looks upon looking at the literature and also defining some of the variables in a better manner.

KEYWORDS: Work-family conflict, Work-life balance, Childcare, Organisational variables, Working women, Dual career couples

INTRODUCTION

Work and family interface has been regarded as one of the most studied social science topics for the past several decades. The initial studies viewed work and family from the prospective of segmentation theory, that regarded work and family as two completely different spheres of one's life and run by their own rules. However, the phenomenon which created the necessity of interdisciplinary study of these work and family is the entry of women in the workforce after large scale industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s. A substantial number of educated women began to enter to the workforce, which was basically dominated by men since the beginning of civilisation. This phenomenon completely altered the very established social definition of mothers, as the caretakers and fathers, as the bread

earners of the family. It brought a major change in the alignment among family, social and organisational life. This change forced the researcher to look into this new issue that cropped up by the interactions between work and non-work pursuits of life and find out some resolutions to these issues. Since then the studies have been going on in this area.

With globalisation and modernisation, social structures gone through complete transformation and given rise to more number of nuclear families with additional family responsibilities. The importance of work in life increased dramatically. Additional dimensions came up in work–family studies like career aspiration, job satisfaction and life satisfactions and so on. With higher load of work, new technological developments, more brain jobs than physical works resulted in new work-

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family issues. Hence this study has no dearth of research dimensions. Travelling ahead in this way, researchers found this issue is not confined to only female or male. Now a days, both male and female employees are trying to juggle between work and non-work domains. This is a problem of both the genders. It is not surprising that studies have found greater reports of work-family conflict for women than for men (Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Duxbury *et al.*, 1994; Wortman *et al.*, 1991). Among these employed women, employed mother are more vulnerable to these kinds of complications because of their multiple role demands and established gender stereotypes.

Studies on work life done in any corner of the world, found female employees to be more negatively affected by this work and family interface than male. This article will focus on the issues of working mothers. The phrase work-life balance is considerably new term as compared to work-life conflict. The literatures studied in this area used work-life balance and work-life conflict interchangeably. Terms like life and family have also been used interchangeably.

CONTEXT

'I don't think women can have it all. I just don't think so'. – Indra Nooyi, Pepsico CEO

The above quote describes the complexities associated in managing work and family both in a healthy way in case of working women, when both biological and career clock tick simultaneously. Slowly the corporate world opening up to accept the non-attainable needs of these conflicting domains. Some even found it mere an illusion to have a complete sense of accomplishment in both these domains of family and work. There is existence of work–family conflict, irrespective of geographical, cultural, gender, profession and age. Though both men and women are equally exposed to the complexities of work-family conflict, a considerable number of studies in this area discovered female employees to be more vulnerable towards the work–family conflicting situations as compared to male (Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Duxbury *et al.*, 1994;

Wortman *et al.*, 1991). Some also argued for higher conflicting situation when there is a preschooler at home. With the sudden rise in the number of dual earner couples, evolvement of nuclear families, the study on childcare/crèche and its relevance to the work family interface got a prominent attention (Zedeck and Mosier, 1990; Buffardi and Erdwins, 1997). Since the beginning, women remained to be the primary care providers for children and household responsibilities. These responsibilities never got discontinued even by the workforce entry of women. It is evident that, even in case of dualearner couples', women are found to spend more time in these non-work domains as compared to their partners, at times found to be psychologically pushed for it (Duxbury, and Higgins, 1994)). The satisfaction gathered from the childcare facility, have been found to be related to absenteeism, turn over, employees psychological presence (Payne *et al.*, 2012), employees job satisfaction (Buffardi and Erdwins, 1997) in the case of working mothers. It has been documented several time, in Indian Context, childcare, in the case dual earning parents, are mostly done by the extended family members (Gupta and Sharma, 2002; Madipelli *et al.*, 2013). However there are evidences of provision for onsite or near site childcare centres in some organisation working in India, as per their WLB policy (Baral and Bhargava, 2011; Valk and Srinivasan, 2011).

Sacrificing career growth, in case of working mothers in India, is highly evident in literature. In 'The Battle for Female Talent in Emerging Markets' a study done on women ambition, it has been found that 85% of the Indian women are highly ambitious about their career, however, only few per cent of them are actually able to enter to a workforce and fulfil their ambition.

Surprisingly, the issue of childcare while the parents are at work remained a problematic and an unresolved topic in the study of work family interface of dual earner families in both western and eastern world.

In this article, we are trying study the impact of childcare satisfaction on the work family conflict in case of working mothers in Indian context. Structure of this article will be as follows.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the burgeoning complexities in the global economic scenario, interlinkage of technology to the job domain and rising multifaceted jobs, have extremely stretched the organisational life; the employees are pushed towards the problems of work and family interface. Work and family are two very essential components one's life.

Work-family conflict defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the role reassures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). According to role strain theory, participation in multiple roles found to be actually challenging, that puts physical as well as psychological pressure on the participant to fulfil multiple demands of various domains. Initial literature regarded this WFC as uni-directional; however further studies found it bi-directional and they are work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW) (Frone *et al.*, 1997).

As per the study done by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), work family conflict is composed of time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict. Time is always a limiting factor for playing multiple role. One cannot have more than 24 h a day. In simple terms non-availability time to perform multiple roles causes time-based conflict. The reason can be non-standard working hours, shifts and so on (Pleck *et al.*, 1980). This time-based conflict has two components in it, one is the time constrain for physical presence and other is a psychological preoccupation that creates barrier for complete involvement in the role expectation (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Strain-based conflict refers to the occurrence of conflict caused by work overload, pressure at work, where an employee is left with no more physical and psychological energy to perform any other family or job roles (Byron, 2005). Behaviour-based conflict refers to behaviours that are effective in one role but that are inappropriately applied in the other. It refers to the incompatibility between the behaviour pattern developed in an individual because of its work characteristics and family role requirements.

Here example of nurses can be taken. Nurses develop certain kind caring, cleanliness character as required by the job, which has a significant impact on family life (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Some managerial roles require certain kind of leadership and dominating characters which are not acceptable at home or family environment.

DEFINITIONS OF WORK–LIFE INTERFACE

Work and Family

Before we go into the depth of this review, we need to get clarity on the meaning of work and family. Work can be defined as paid employment. However it also comprised of the non-paid domains of work, commute to work, extended work hours, work related hangovers. The problems faced by farmers, sales people, self-employment and who work from home. Here the time has no definite limit and interference of work into family domain is much higher (Guest, 2002). According to the Oxford dictionary, family is regarded as a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children and siblings (Family, 2014). The concept of life will be broader than family. Life will include all non-paid and non-work aspects of an individual.

Work-Family Conflict (WFC)

Kahn had done some pioneer studies in this area of work–family conflict. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined this work life conflict on the basis of study done by Kahn *et al.* (1964). Work family conflict is defined 'a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually in compatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role' (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985: 77). Some studies also found strain arising out of multiple roles as the basis of this conflict. According to role strain theory, participation in multiple roles found to be actually challenging, which puts physical as well as

psychological pressure on the participant to fulfil multiple demands of various domains. This creates distress in the individual involved in it. Higher role demand will lead to higher incompatibility and higher role conflict and strain (Goode, 1960). The combined effect of these theories indicates that work–family conflict results in lot of physical and psychological stress on the individual involved in it. Researchers have used terms like ‘work–life’, ‘work–home’ (e.g. Geurts *et al.*, 2003), work–non-work’ (Dikkers *et al.*, 2005) like phrases in the similar kind of studies. Work–life balance is a comparatively new terminology. Both work–life conflict and work–life balance coexists together.

Types of Work–Life Conflicts

As per the study done by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) work–family conflict is composed of time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict. Time is always a limiting factor for playing multiple roles. One cannot have more than 24 hours a day. In simple terms, non-availability of time to perform multiple roles causes time-based conflict. The reason can be non-standard working hours, shifts and so on (Pleck *et al.*, 1980). This time based conflict has two components in it, one is the time constrain for physical presence and other is a psychological preoccupation that creates barrier for complete involvement in the role expectation. Strain-based conflict refers to the occurrence of conflict caused by work overload, pressure at work, where an employee is left with no more physical and psychological energy to perform any other family or job roles. Behaviour-based conflict refers to behaviours that are effective in one role but that are inappropriately applied in the other. It refers to the incompatibility between the behaviour pattern developed in an individual because of his/her work characteristics and family role requirements. Here an example of nurses can be taken. Nurses develop certain kind caring, cleanliness character as required by the job, which has a significant impact on family life (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Some managerial roles require certain kind of leadership and dominating character which are not acceptable at home or family environment.

Dimensions of Work–Life Conflict

Prior studies regarded work–life conflict to be one-dimensional, that means only work roles were interfering with family role requirements and regarded this interaction to be deleterious by nature. However, further studies done in this domain found this family work conflict to be bi-dimensional in nature. Work stressor and support mechanism influence family domain causing work–family conflict (WIF) and family stressors and support mechanism influences work domain causing family–work conflict (FIW) (Frone *et al.*, 1993).

After decades of research in this area of work life conflict, a new terminology got introduced to this area called spill over (Crouter, 1984). This spill over can be positive or negative. When work characteristics put negative effect on family life, called negative spill over and the positive impact is called as positive spill over. In contrast to the initial theory of role conflict which indicated playing multiple roles have negative impact on personnel well-being; researchers took expansionist theory that suggested the mutual benefits of playing multiple roles. Expansionist theory describes a positive win–win situation for multiple roles played. Satisfaction in one role influences positively to the other role. Higher job satisfaction leads to higher family satisfaction and vice versa (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). This effect has been regarded as work–life enhancement, work–life facilitation or work–life enrichment.

Childcare

Childcare is defined as the supervision of children while their parents work or are engaged in other activities. It is often known by other terms. Day care is commonly used as a synonym, though a large number of parents work evening and night shifts and require odd-hour care. Between fathers and mothers, mothers are more concern for children (Conley, 2010).

Childcare and Work

Apart from all the joys of freedom, independence and career; motherhood and childcare undoubtedly are the two precious phases in most female’s life. These two

phases make women more vulnerable to the work family issues; as the health and emotions both are at stake. Researcher says, an adult can take care of oneself; but a child needs a genuine care giver. Though we are not emphasising the childhood growth pattern here; as per child psychologist these period is highly important for one's entire life growth. According to Gregg *et al.* (2005), 'The children of the least educated mothers appear overall not to be disadvantaged when their mothers work, leaving the negative effects concentrated amongst the children of the more educated mothers'. Childcare responsibilities are a crucial factor contributing to women's fragmented labour force participation and a significant barrier to occupational mobility (Dex, 1987).

Past two decades has witnessed a significant rise in the employment of women after child birth. As per Government norms in India, every female employee can take six months maternity leave maximum for two children. However, there is no concern of employer after six months of maternity leave; even though there is a growing concern for early child developments and safety factors. When a majority of the female workforce is in the private sector, there is specific legal compliance for this.

Introduction of childcare facilities came long back during the World War II, because of large scale entry of women in the defence related work (Glass and Estes, 1997). That was the trigger for the industrialist thinking up of such provisions for female employees, as pregnancy and child birth are the truth any female's life.

With formation of higher number of nuclear families, caretaking arrangements for the child in a dual earning family turned to be the most challenging task, generating higher level strain, anxiety in the parents (Fuqua and Labensohn, 1986; Skinner, 1980). The childcare options available for working mothers are childcare centres, babysitters and care by extended family members. Non availability of literature on these extended family members' caregiving virtually got removed from the variable list. None of the options between daycare

centres' and babysitters' fees are cheap; however, a mother with a fulltime job has no other option than to use some type of non-maternal care in her absence (Bernal, 2008). The crucial part is the mothers' satisfaction out of the caregiver that resulted in her level of anxiety and strain. Generally,

There are numerous evidences where women voluntarily opted for marginal jobs with less working hours and no career prospects, or more qualified women will choose to halt progression within organisations as managerial positions are highly time demanding; which is incompatible with caregiving responsibilities (Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

Childcare in Indian Context

There is a visible contrast between western social system and Indian families. Most of the researchers found India with an established norm of joint family system. Hofstede (1984) has expressed similar views. He has pointed out that countries are different on the levels their cultural values. Using these cultural values, he described India as a highly collectivistic society. Existence of joint family system and bonding between grandparents and grandchildren makes it easy for working mothers to manage kids and work simultaneously. In India, easy availability of cheap labour to do household work also helps the working couples (Pal, 2014).

Undoubtedly, established social stereotypes and gender role perception have been consistently appeared in work-family research (Lewis and Cooper, 1999). In addition to this, employed mothers are more exposed to conflicting situations because of their multiple role demands and established gender stereotypes in the society (Gani and Ara, 2010). Indian society follows patriarchal norms where working women are generally at the receiving end, those sacrifice their career with the intention of fulfilling their family commitments (Desai, 1996; cited in Aryee *et al.*, 2005).

In addition to this, having a joint family also has significant impact on the career issues of women. It has been found that, women with higher number of

family members required to make more adjustments while at home as compared to others. It reduces the locus of control which is more important in taking decisions related to work.

However, burgeoning number of nuclear families in India, resulted out of migration to different states because of job requirement, makes it difficult for the working mother work peacefully while child is with alternative caregiver. Indians, not having any exposure of these issues of childcare because of the traditional joint family system, made it tough for the women to cope up. Any legal provision for childcare allowance in India is yet to come. In a special provision in the sixth pay commission, working women with disabilities have been entitled to get Rs. 1000 per month as Special Allowance for Child care, till child becomes two years¹. Though this is relieving for the working mothers as government is getting sensitised to the issue of childcare and its associated cost.

Childcare Satisfaction and Work–Family Conflict

Child Care Satisfaction (CCS) is how parents feel about the childcare arrangement for their children while at work. The three key components of this CCS have been described as caregivers attentiveness, caregivers communication and caregivers dependability. Out of these, the initial two components has major contribution on work attitude affecting job performance and organisational commitment. A well attentive and communicative childcare facility reduces mother’s guilt for leaving child and gives psychological freedom to concentrate on work; outcome is reduced work and family role conflict (Buffardi and Erdwins, 1997). If the mother is not satisfied with the available facility for childcare at home, at work or any other paid service, she remains tensed. The problem grows to manifold when the child is sick. No childcare facility will keep a sick child. Majority of working women found conflict with work when they have a sick child at home (Anderson-Kulman and Paludi, 1986; Payne *et al.*, 2012). One reliable and satisfactory child care would reduce family interfering with work (FIW) type of

conflict because CCS influence a mother’s ability to come to work, mindfully present and perform better while there. CCS is negatively related to absenteeism related to childcare issues (Payne *et al.*, 2012).The cost associated with childcare also influences the satisfaction generated out of this. In a study done on childcare subsidy, childcare in a subsidised rate not only reduces the chance of mothers’ labour force opt out, but also lessens the work–life conflict associated to it (Press *et al.*, 2006).

Some working mothers do not have trust on childcare centres because of some worst cases of negligence came into limelight. They have taken help of immediate family members (in-laws), and as a consequence face the anger of them (Madipelli *et al.*, 2013).Children, who are given with proper care, grow into practical human beings having the ability for economic, political and national participation. Hence childcare satisfaction is significantly related to mothers work performance and work life conflict of family interfering work (FIW) type. Studies done in this domain found a very significant link between childcare, childrearing, childcare satisfaction and work–family conflict. There is no doubt that having a child at home requires a crucial share of time and energy of a mother to be spent on it.

Organisational Interventions to Manage Childcare

Work family conflict and the potential impact on job performance have been identified long back. Higher level of conflicting situation influences one’s physical and psychological presence at work, learning potential, behaviour pattern at work, health issues, career decisions and so on. Seeing this centrality of the issue, organisations have initiated with numerous interventions to support this vulnerable group. Out of the existing organisational interventions, flexible working hour, dependent care and childcare has gained public attention in case of dual earning couples (Baral and Bhargava, 2011). Mind tree, Intel and others are providing childcare facilities.

¹<http://www.delhi.gov.in/DoIT/DTC/PDF/6PCR/estt.%28allow%29.pdf>

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The insights originated out of available literatures, hold responsible sudden large scale industrialisation, globalisation and its resultant socio-demographic, technological change for this drastic alteration in the very established definition male to be the bread earners and mother to be the caregivers of the family regardless of regions and religions. The most vulnerable member who suffered in this changed scenario is the child who had a genuine need for a caregiver at home. This tricky situation resulted in originating the debate for setting up of childcare facilities in industrial units. However the irony was childcare facilities were confined to some specific areas, with numerous number terms and condition revolving around it. Even after this development, women started leaving workforce for child rearing. This gives a clear indication of deficiency in case of fulfilling the objective behind childcare.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The result of the current study gives a brief idea about the concern of working mothers for their childcare facility. From this study, we found that a significant

stress has been given on cost and safety factor of the childcare facility, other factors which can act as antecedents for further studies, these can be individual barriers, organisational barriers and barriers created by society. Our further work is in identifying these variables only and the impact of the same. Our primary interviews in this area are indicative that most of the parents, whose children were in early childhood life of 1–3 years; in their qualitative discussion indicated a kind of helplessness while they are at work. However, this fearness goes away slowly with the growth in the age children. This study can add insight to the literature of work and family studies with a focus to the childcare. Organisations can also use this input in developing intervention strategies for working mothers in their organisation. This is pool talent, that get demotivated in the long run if this issue has not been addressed on time, as psychology says, irrespective of job domain, culture, education mother will remain sensitive towards kids.

This study has been done in developed city, where professional childcare centres are easily available. However, there are many small cities and towns in India, where the concept of professional childcare centre yet to come into practice.

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