



Women Dilemmas in Cultural Context

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Abstract- Logically it is assumed that society is man-made. Practically men have been considered as one of the dominant force in developing and shaping social institutions as well public life whereby women dominate in shaping family life. In the context of Pakistan which still have traces of world's oldest cultural society, men are assumed as wage earners whereas women are assumed as family care takers. Thus in this cultural context the current study intends to explore which sort of pressures a married working women face and what sort of coping mechanism has been adopted by them to deal with these pressures. The current study utilized qualitative approach as it best serve the purpose of study which was intended to explore challenges as well experiences faced by married working women. In order to understand the subjective explanations, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) rooted in phenomenological philosophy was carried out. This method allows understanding the lived experiences of the participants from their (participants) perspective. The target of the study was married working women thus the study employed purposive sampling technique to select out study participants. The sample consisted of 118 participants holding prominent positions who were interviewed (semi-structured) to generate their responses regarding challenges faced by them while performing multiple roles. The findings of current study can be concluded that despite facing external as well as internal family pressures, women in Pakistan wear a mask to comply with family and work requirements. In current social system, they sought numerous middle grounds to smoothen family as well work life.

Key Words: Gender roles, Discrimination, Stereotyping, Izzat, Coping Mechanism

I. INTRODUCTION

As a general perception men creates societies. Men dominates in developing as well shaping public life while women develops and dominates family life (Hakim, 2006). In this context though Pakistan is an emerging nation yet has traces of worlds' oldest cultural society where men are considered as wage earners and women are considered as family care takers (Malik & Khalid, 2008). These reasons instill belief to view society as predominantly man-made. Man-made societies set out the framework for social interaction, connection and gender segregation of jobs. Though rise in industrialization changed the layout of Pakistan's economy however no or very little change has been taken place relating to cultural framework and expectations pertaining to women. Though continuously changing trends has permitted women to join organizations; now they too contribute economically for family (Ullah, 2010). However, their primary role as family care taker has not been changed. Consequently women face double pressure (Saher et al., 2013) from home as well work without any relaxation.

Generally women desires to stay at home as they know that their actual domain is home. However, sometimes it becomes necessity for them to go out for job. Even then they experience guiltiness for not giving full time to family for assuming parental responsibilities. As soon after childhood women are mentally prepared to best serve their future roles as being wives as well mothers and for this they were taught the merits of subordination as well endurance (Song, 2001). For this, as a matter of fact women generally cannot partake in society like men as they are restricted to deal with household matters only (Lee & Keith, 1999). Working women face several challenges while performing multiple roles and responsibilities. The expectations and family requirements are totally different from what is desired on the job which further complicates their lives. Dual responsibilities confirms dual pressures as they have to concurrently fight on double fore's (Hyder, 2009). Drawing on conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989) limited time, energy and other resources puts pressures on women to balance work and family lives. Especially married working women find it most difficult to balance their work as well family lives (Gordon, Karen & Berry, 2004).

Furthermore, in Pakistani context numerous other factors like religion, patriarchal structures of the families; kinship relations etc. restrict individual independence and existence of women (Rouse, 1986). Social norms pertaining to appropriateness of profession (Kazi, 1999) further narrow down women career choice. In Pakistan, the legislation which has been made in the name of religion has affected women's rights holding them back to take autonomous decisions related to their personal as well professional lives (Rouse, 2002). Working women in Pakistan display their fullest potential in terms of hard work to balance their professional roles with cultural demands of them as mothers as well wives (Haeri, 2002). Since, it was and still assumed that only women owe to meet household responsibilities. Husband do not share household work (psychological block) as it's completely women's responsibility which makes their work more challenging (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1981). Prevailed male dominance has affected women physically as well psychologically. Their discriminatory attitudes badly influenced women's mental, emotional and psychological health-wellbeing threatened almost all spheres of women's life (Ahwireng-Obeng, 1993).

Working women have to handle jointly work as well family responsibilities nevertheless organizational cultures are most likely to be intolerant in allowing flexibility in managing both (Legault, 2003) thus women suffers. Women have left with no choice expect making adjustment adhering to socio-cultural norms as well organizational policies to meet expectations and requirements of both spheres. Keeping in mind extant literature the current research intends to investigate which sort of pressures a working women face and what sort of coping mechanism has been adopted by them to deal with these pressures.

A Brief Background of Pakistani Society

In Pakistani society, highest priority for women is to perform their domestic, maternal as well spousal roles while least preferable to perform their occupational as well communal roles. Primary role for a married women is to put up with her marriage believing her to be responsible for quality for her married life. Women are expected to be self-sacrificing as well untiring. Sheltered environment is provided to them where maximum decisions of her life are taken by others. Early in life she has been taught lessons pertaining to moral as well social codes of behavior. Since childhood they learn cooking, cleaning, washing, elderly as well baby care are their major responsibilities. Soon after marriage they are virtually owned by their husbands (as material possessed) and they do not have any sort of objection on it as they are defenseless: socially, culturally and financially they completely rely on their husbands.

Women deprives social value as well status in Pakistani social context. The birth of a boy child is always greeted with greater interest, girl child are less welcomed, less valued, and less cared consequently gets less attention and resources. Preference is given to sons as they were assumed to economically contribute to meet household needs. Parents expect financial support from their sons in later age. Consequently preference regarding household resource allocation is also given to them concerning provision of better education and other required skills to meet and compete in the social as well public arena. Usually girls are considered as burden due to problems associated with maintaining family honor and prestige. Soon after infancy they are being taught to serve home and family. Mothers educates their daughters regarding household responsibilities in raising their own kids and taking care of her family. Even elder daughters are also expected to take care of their younger sisters and brothers. In short they are bound to serve traditional family roles and requirements as mothers and wives.

Women role is generally seen as less demanding thus least appreciated by their families. Men as family head do not accept to allow his woman to work as he does not want her to become his rival. These social as well cultural restrictions limit-sized skills, knowledge and opportunities for women. These circumstances has caused women's social as well economic dependency on men which may serve as the base for men power over women on entire social relations and connections (Shahla, 2002). Women in Pakistan either educated or illiterate are subject to disgracing and discriminating laws, traditions and biases prevailed in the society. A typical male as breadwinner philosophy has persistently undervalued women as wage earners. Their roles being producers and providers are highly negated.

Women are not considered equal to men thus comparatively occupy lower position in the society. Men are considered as family head thus ultimate decision making authority lies with men where women are given no importance at all (Menhas et al., 2013). Pakistani society's cultural as well social aspects are largely patriarchal reflecting two separate worlds for men and women. Home is considered as the legitimate philosophical place for women whereas men dominates outside world. This false distinction between

inner and outer worlds has been made and maintained in the name of izzat (honour) and pardah (veil). Assumed threat to women's izzat and honour restricts their mobility outside home. Thus they rarely go out of their homes alone; they generally move with their fathers, brothers and/or husband. Otherwise they are desired to stay at home within boundaries and restrictively forbidden to come in contact with any outside male.

Pakistan history witnessed that women are provided with fewer job opportunities and have fewer legal rights. They are supposed to be intellectually inferior to males. They are well thought-out as naturally weaker thus do not suitable for jobs requiring physical as well intellectual effort resultantly left to homes to fix domestic tasks. These social as well cultural pressures prevent numerous brilliant women to pursue jobs. Despite all these facts, last two decades witnessed the change in ideology, people mind-set, living patterns as well employment patterns. Now women are encouraged to attend schools, opportunities in this respect has been increased. This shift has not granted to them. Their rights to education, rights to freedom, rights to work has not been served with kindness: for this Pakistani women struggled hard, came across painful situations as well experiences involving numerous sacrifices. Now broad range of occupations are available for women to make a choice though their representation in all those occupations is still less. Women are now serving as doctors, fashion designers, beauticians, receptionists, models, singers, directors, entrepreneurs, administrators, bankers, sports players, TV producers, marketers, sales women, etc. In short now women are working side by side with men in almost all fields. The fight is not yet over: they need to go a long way, still have to fight for status they deserve.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research approach is one of the best way to investigate problems associated with performing multiple roles and enduring pressures. Thus the study used qualitative approach. For the purpose of understanding subjective explanations Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is grounded on the philosophy of phenomenology was conducted. IPA actually permits to understand participants' endured life experiences from their (respondents) angle. Employing this method allows to gaze at meanings attributed to different lived experiences of the respondents' as they make logical connections as well explanations about their own personal as well social world perspective (Smith, 2004).

Moreover, the underlying reason to use this approach also lies in the fact that by tradition numerous women's libber researchers used qualitative methods to examine and report women perspective explained in their words (Coolican, 2004). In addition to this, it has been emphasized to spot and speak about women's life experiences as well their connected social expression (Chodorow, 1989).

Sample

The present study sample comprised 118 participants. As the present study intended to explore pressures/problems confronted by married working women holding prominent positions thus purposive sampling technique was employed. All of the participants were highly qualified in their respective fields. For instance, 23 were chairpersons, 06 were Deans of the Faculties. 47 were lady doctors, 42 were serving on prominent positions in banks. The participants belonged to Punjab Province of Pakistan as well Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Tool

The tool which was used to gather participants' responses were semi-structured interviews. In an attempt to confirm content validity of instrument, the included inquiries (questions) were on entire family environment (early as well current), autonomy related to decision making, multiple roles encounter as well adjustment decisions, pressures from both home as well work and lastly their experiences related to coping mechanism. A little bit modification in asked questions were made as per participants' responses. Though, the key structure of the interview protocol remained intact throughout all interviews which was not difficult to maintain because of similarity in respondents' experiences. Sample questions asked during interview were: How did you manage work demands and family demands? ; How did you prioritize relating to fulfilling work demands as well family demands? ; Did you get any sort of support from your

work and/or family to smoothen both affairs? ; What sort of coping mechanism adopted by you to handle situations?

Data Collection Procedure

The participants were contacted in their offices. They were briefed about purpose of conducting research moreover informed about voluntary participation and ensured confidentiality of data. After taking formal consent from them they were interviewed for almost 45-50 minutes. All the participants' were thanked for their active participation. The interviews for the data analysis were tape recorded as well transcribed. After transcribing data, the study participants were contacted again to gaze at under or over representation as well missing aspects, if any. This ensured validity of information provided as well reported.

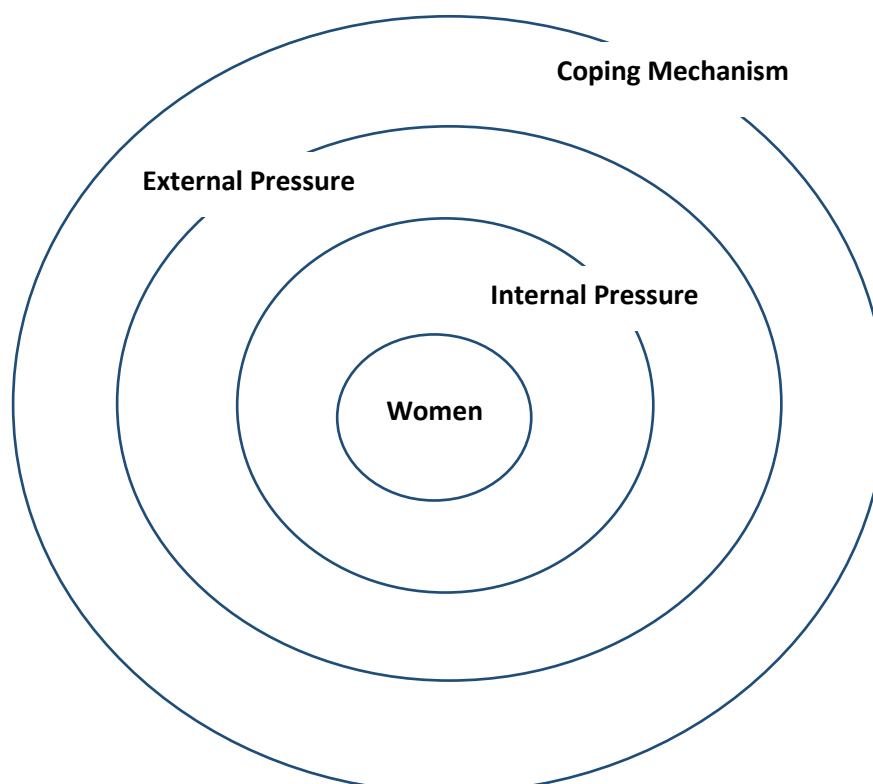
Data Explication

Explicating data pursuing phenomenological research involves attention focusing on interaction taken place between the subject as well as her experiences in narration. Then intentional analysis of the subjects' experiences on the basis of subjects' perception helps in deriving themes or cruxes or essences. This enables considering experience total meaning set in a particular context instead of considering a single account of an experience. The data explication was carried out by adopting the following (Hycner, 1985; 1999) steps:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2. Delineating units of meaning
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes
4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data explication of the interviews exposed two types of pressures confronted by working women of Pakistan. The composite form of pressures and its associated experiences are illustrated in a model shown below.



Internal Pressures

The study findings revealed numerous challenges a working women of Pakistan faces. About 80% of the participants revealed that dual pressures from home and work are one of the biggest challenge they confronted in managing both lives. As per one participant:

“I love my family as well my job-both are dear to me, important to me. I give my maximum effort, energy and time to serve best in both domains but sometimes feel tired, exhausted in meeting expectations related to family and work”.

This response confirmed that multiple roles are performed by working women. On one hand they have to look after children, manage kitchen and other household chores and on the other hand they need to complete office work at job. They stressed that performing multiple roles produces unharmonious situation creating stress.

The participants’ of the study reported that most of the time to meet family expectations and requirements they prefers to work at night for instance, cooking, ironing clothes etc. They shared that due to tough work at work and home they experiences restlessness, anxiety, depression and exhaustion. 78% of the respondents’ claimed that they have forgotten their own self for family and work. As few defendants stated that:

“I don’t have any sort of support from my husband in dealing with conflicting situation. Especially managing kids. I sacrifice my rest, my energy and time to avoid conflict-which is really exhausting”.

“I find it hard to manage my job due to family and my family due to my job. Neither my job environment nor my family is supportive. I feel continuous stress.”

Few respondents’ were happy with respect to husband and family support as they reported that:

“I enjoy full support of my husband and family in managing both sort of responsibilities. Even then unable to manage things becomes anxious, worried, stressed. I cannot manage time.”

Research findings revealed that dual roles in both cases (with or without family support) makes women life more challenging. Maximum respondents contend that continuity in bearing pressures from both sides had made their personal lives more stressful and tense. In order to meet these conflicting situations they often plan and prioritize diverse tasks resultantly surrendering their own sleep as well rest times.

The findings of the study further explored that women who have excessive financial resources as well limited financial resources both gets it hard in dealing with dual roles and associated pressures. As some respondents shared that:

“I am financially strong, can afford to hire a maid in getting my household tasks done. But still unfortunate in arranging a permanent honest maid who honestly takes interest in rearing my children. This non-permanence in maid’s availability and honesty made me to move around and work all the time.”

Contrarily few states that:

“I do not have enough money to arrange a maid. So, after completing work related tasks I have to do all household chores which are really exhausting.”

These statements confirmed that economic condition of families do matters in a certain context. But cannot provide real contentment to working women as they have to perform multiple roles which complicates their work and family lives.

Moreover, results signified that excessive work and time pressures are also major challenge for working women. As integrating work-family requirements and responsibilities generates time-based conflict especially when children are young (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

In this context few respondents were of the stance that:

“One big threat of my professional life is inability in managing quality time for family especially my children. I cannot give proper time for children’s education, healthiness, civilization and this is devastating really disturbing.”

The above stated response was the most reported stance of majority respondents. They feel high level of dissatisfaction for not giving and/or managing proper time for their kids’ studies, healthcare etc. These results reflected the real inner experiences in terms of dissatisfaction, displeasure of working women with respect to child education, health and care.

However, the responses with respect to all above stated concerns of working women living in a joint-family are in contrast. The findings revealed that about 74% of working women shared a sense of satisfaction concerning children studies and other concerns’ due to family support. The availability of grandparents in home ensures proper check and balance on children. This further guarantees children quality care, education as well socialization, assuring they are in safe hands yielding maximum satisfaction for mothers (working women). As stated:

“I love to work as my mother-in-law, sisters-in-law are there to support me. They handle children at homes which is a real blessing for me.”

Few others too have same type of versions like:

“Joint-family is amazing. I give proper time to work and family because family members share home responsibilities.”

“I feel pride when I see my husband and other family members taking care of everything that belongs to me. On returning home I prepare dinner of their choice and spend quality time with my family, my in-laws etc. It really priceless.”

All these above stated responses confirmed satisfaction and pleasure for working women who are living in a joint family system. When family members share responsibilities ultimately lowers pressures as well work load. On contrary there were working women who are also living in a joint family system but do not get any sort of family support. As few shared that:

“I live in a joint-family system. None from in-laws support me in carrying out my home responsibilities. Instead of sharing my household tasks they burdened me by demanding certain protocols which is regretful. Ultimately I feel physically as well mentally exhausted.”

It means different type of family set-ups, with diverse demands complicates working women life. Instead of helping them out, family members contributes to increase their homework which increases level of dissatisfaction, tension as well exhaustion.

External Pressures

Working women also elaborated numerous external pressures in carrying out their dual roles. For instance, some of them shared their experiences relating to prevalence of gender culture, gender stereotyping, gender inequality etc. According to them:

“There is gender culture at work which is major source of mental exhaustion for me.”

Few others were of the stance that:

“I cannot change people presumptions about gender stereotyping. Despite hard work I always feel disappointment, displeasure at work having spillover effects on my family life.”

Few more in this perspective:

“Women are always assumed like not having required skills. This biasness is really frustrating on the job.”

These versions revealed that at workplace women do not get any sort of support from male colleagues. Even their male colleagues think that they lack necessary skills to do work in an accurate as well efficient manner. Moreover, they think that women cannot perform at their fullest as they are unable to stay in late hours etc. In addition to this some shared that on first place we do not get any sort of appreciation from higher authorities for our work, if so it would be attributed to sexual favors. As some declared that:

“I praised for my work for the first time. Instead of appreciation my colleagues associated it with sexual favor which was embarrassing, thus I preferred to leave that job.”

This highlighted aspect is really humiliating. These findings of the study got support from Birley (1989) who stressed that women praise for her work, or her promotion on merit is always attributed by her colleagues as a sexual favor. This sort of embarrassing situation entails psychological pressure thus may lead women to quit job. Generally women do not feel to be challenged intellectually but these sort of psychological pressures limit their energetic participation in performing dual roles. This sort of annoying behavior from colleagues, employers, high officials cause psychological pressures on women (Hyder, 2009) causing women to leave their current jobs.

Contrarily, women at work are not always weak. About 67% of the participants' stated that their male colleagues supports and respects them. They help them out in dealing with complex situations at work which boosted their confidence and enabled them in proving their abilities. Furthermore, in most cases (stated) their employing organizations have treated them on equal concerning remuneration, promotion etc. As per few respondents:

“I am lucky enough to have supportive male colleagues who supports me and guides me where I need to deal with complex tasks. They treat me in a respectable way which is satisfying for a working women.”

As few more declared that:

“I always earned respect and support from male counter-parts. Equal rights are being served and cared which comforts me assuring that I have chosen right profession and institution.”

This statement highlights that if working-environment is cooperative, facilitating can increase working women morale in coping with both affairs in productive ways. However, there were cases who have shared their experiences regarding tough requirements, duty schedules at work. According to few respondents':

“I have to face more problems as I have tough duty schedules and extended working hours which not only complicates my work life but family life.”

This statement affirms that all those working women have support from their colleagues as well employers/bosses regarding flexibility in duty schedules etc. feel much convenience on their jobs as compared to those who have tough duty schedules as well other requirements. These finding of the study are also consistent with previous work of Ralston (1990) and Piotrkowski, Rapoport & Rapoport, (1987) who too argued that tough duty schedules as well extended working hours makes women job more complex leading to increase many family problems as well conflict. Thus all these factors to large extent on one hand can facilitate working women and on the other hand can complicate their work as well family lives.

Coping Strategies

Sometimes the working women needs to integrate their work and family lives to reduce associated stress and conflict. In most cases about 80% reported that the support they get from in-laws, husband, and other relatives serves as a unifying bond which let them perform their work related tasks efficiently as well effectively. On the other hand, majority respondents' about 77% shared that the support they get from

their colleagues, friends, staff and immediate boss are a real coping mechanism while dealing with dual stresses.

Secondly, the flexibility from both domains (home and work) to manage work and family lives is another important contributor which helps to cope with multiple pressures. Numerous researchers too support these findings of the study. As per them when family members, friends as well colleagues share responsibilities serves as best strategy to handle multiple demands and pressures (Banyard & Graham-Bermann, 1993). Additionally, spousal as well supervisors' support has served best in minimalizing conflict (Erdwins et al., 2001).

Despite this fact that working women who are highly paid can afford paid labor for household tasks or for hiring nannies for children care (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; Hochschild, 2000). This can serve as best strategy but in our case maximum respondents' do not shown trust on paid labor especially for child care. The study findings revealed that where family and/or spousal support was not available then women preferred to postpone their own promotion related tasks, compromised with family as well work requirements to avoid conflict. They redefined meaning of success for them which helped them in cultivating personal qualities enabling them to deal with multiple pressures and situations. Moreover, working women put on a mask to act at surface or sometimes they acted deep to show genuine which is really exhausting for them.

IV. CONCLUSION

Researchers' have documented certain family-bounded pressures on working women (Olsson & Pringle, 2004; Rosser, 2004). Women responsibility to look after her children and family is one of the major concerns (MaryWentling, 2003). Their caring responsibilities at home including children and elderly relatives (Sargeant, 2001) unavoidably creates a restrictive impact in their way to development (Sargeant, 2001; Wilson, 2003). Relating to external pressures one of the biggest pressures a woman faces and is aware of is prevailed gender culture at work (Lemons, 2003; Rosser, 2004). Since, it limits women behavioral expressions (Rosser, 2004). Numerous researchers' highlighted other cultural barriers confronted by women like prejudices, gender stereotyping, discrimination, sexual harassment etc (Maddock & Parkin, 1993; Rosser, 2004; Still & Timms, 2000). Moreover, certain organizational barriers also made it difficult for women to work at ease like gender inequality, blocked promotions, dysfunctional legislation (Cassell, 2000; Cooke, 2001; Rindfleish, 2000) which further complicates women job.

Working women in Pakistan faces uneven load of family responsibilities. Child plus elderly care as well other home burdens makes it difficult for them to manage home responsibilities with job requirements. This is also due to multiple roles (roles over load). Lack of social support from family as well others contributes to make women life tough. Numerous researchers also support this notion that unbalanced family duties as well responsibilities are major factors in complicating working women life (Bird, 2006; Cross & Linehan, 2006; Matthew & Panchanathan, 2011). The findings of the study further confirmed that all those working women who do not get any sort of help from any family member to manage household chores faces more problems as compared to those who gets extra help from family. This finding of the study is also confirmed by Pattanaik and Worley (2011).

In order to meet work as well family demands working women faces excessive work pressures from both domains home and work. Accordingly time-based conflict arises because of role overload (Moen & Yu, 2000). Sometimes to deal with pressures and demands from both sides women work for long hours which reduces their rest time. Resultantly becomes restless, stressful, anxious as well irritable due to limited energy (Sparks et al., 1997). Unfriendly work environment as well inequity at the workplace (Budhwar, Saini & Bhatnagar, 2005) negatively affects them. Additionally attitude of the co-workers and supervisors significantly play a major role in managing work as well family lives. The findings of current study can be concluded that despite facing external as well as internal family pressures, women in Pakistan wear a mask to comply with family and work requirements. In current social system, they sought numerous middle grounds to smoothen family as well work life.

V. IMPLICATIONS

Women as a member of society takes more than equal responsibility and share more than equal burdens. Working women perform multiple roles so endures more pressures. Thus understanding barriers

(internal-external) confronted by them will help smoothen work as well family environment. This is the utmost responsibility and should be highest national concern that problems and/or barriers faced by the working women needs to be recognized as well resolved. As it helps develops women leading to develop society then ultimately country (Still & Timms, 2000).

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study utilized sample of 118 respondents which may not produce exact state of affairs of working women as a vast majority of women are now employed, thus issues related to generalization still exists. Secondly, interviews were conducted with due vigilance which is really an exhaustive work. Indeed due to time as well cost constraints the working women of only Punjab Province of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir were contacted. Thus future researchers by increasing sample size and by adopting mixed methodologies can make enormous contribution in the given context.

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