

Work-Life Balance among Married Women Working in Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study is to determine whether married women working in the public sector are able to sustain work-life balance and to elicit their views and suggestions on the support system needed to improve their work-life balance. This study adopts a quantitative method. Surveys were used as the main tool to gather data from seventy-six (76) women working in various public sectors in Komplek Tun Abdul Razak (KOMTAR) Penang. The study discovers that in general, married women working in public sectors are able to sustain work-life balance. The main support is the spouses who often help the women with their housework. However, most of the housework is done during weekends because of the limited time during the working days. The respondents agree that they are also able to spend good quality time with their families. The support system suggested by the respondents to promote work-life balance includes leave policies, flexible working hours, childcare centers and nursery room facilities at workplaces. Services suggested are Employee Assistance Program (EAP), counseling services and series of trainings for public sector employees in providing skills and knowledge to improve work-life balance.

Keywords: *work-life balance, working women, public sector.*

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INTRODUCTION

Previously, women helped their spouses in productive roles by working in the agricultural sector, which was more flexible in working hours. The nature

of working in farms enabled women to manage their housework and to look after their children while working in the field. However, at present the nature of working has changed. Women have to work in offices, shops, factories and educational institutions in fixed working hours. They have to work away from their families. This means that they have to manage both housework and office work separately. Hence, this situation induces work-family conflict or family-work conflict.

Many working women face conflicts to meet their responsibilities for family and work. The conflict arises because the inability to meet the demand for work and family harmoniously causes them to be more involved with one role and have difficulty in performing the other role (Voydanoff, 1988).

In general, work-life balance means employee's perception that they are able to manage multiple domains of personal time, family care, and work with a minimum of role conflict (Clark, 2000; Ungerson & Yeandle, 2005 in Delina & Raya, 2013). It is also can be defined the ability of an individual to meet her work and family commitments, as well as additional non-work responsibilities and activities (Delecta, 2011). This signifies that at least there are four domains involve in determining work-life balance; work, family, self and other activities.

Work-life balance and work-life conflict have become major issues focusing on working women particularly married-working women as more women involve in formal employment sector. Their involvement is due to several reasons such as to improve the standard of living of their households, more women become well educated as many of them graduated at higher level of education and to fulfill the needs of the country's employment requirement.

It is indeed become a tough challenge for married women to perform their duties well both at home and office. When they become mothers, they have to manage children, manage the housework and continue on their career path. This means that working mothers of today have to fulfill family responsibilities and also have to remain fully involved in their careers (Delina & Raya, 2013). This necessitates them to cope with the competing demands of their multiple roles.

In economic perspective, women labour force is important to fulfill the needs of employment sectors to improve the economic achievement of a country. However, it is vital to have productive and efficient women labour

force to avoid unnecessary cost of production in private sector and to also to ensure efficient services in public sector. Nevertheless, socially, women are needed to manage their families. Thus, it is crucial for a country to be able to provide support systems to assist women in coping with their multiple roles. The result would be women with work-life balance could perform well both in their career and would produce healthy and happy families. This also would instigate happy and productive working women.

This study is to determine whether married women working in the public sector are able to sustain work-life balance and to elicit their views and suggestions on the support system such as supporting infrastructure, social support and services needed to improve their work-life balance. The public sector is chosen for this study because recently government has initiated various infrastructure and services related to childcare facilities and services to the public sector employees to improve their work-life balance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To achieve the aspirations of the nation as a high-income nation by 2020, the Malaysian government emphasizes the holistic progression which takes into account the development of human capital as an important objective in The Eleventh Malaysia Plan. The development in human capital is essential to generate and sustain the country's economic growth as well as to improve the quality of life of the people.

For working women, one of the indicators of having good quality of life is to have work-life balance. Employees with work-life balance feel their lives are fulfilled both inside and outside of work (Byrne, 2005). Working women with work-life balance are competent to be productive human capital.

Development of Human Capital

Through the 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP), the government has implemented various education plans to improve the quality of human capital such as the Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013-2025 (Preschool Education to the Secondary Education), Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2015-2025 (Higher Education), and Talent Roadmap 2020. The agenda is to produce knowledgeable, skilled and positive human capital is continued through the

11MP, whereby the government focuses on four areas which are: improving the labour market efficiency to increase economic growth; transforming the Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) to meet industry demand; strengthening lifelong learning for skill upgrades; and improving the quality of the education system for the enhancement of students' outcomes and institutional excellence.

While the economic agenda outlined in the 11MP is expected to create 1.5 million jobs by 2020 with targeted improvements in labour productivity and a reduction in dependence on low-skilled foreign workers, both due to the continuous shift from labour-intensive economic activities to knowledge-based and innovation economies. About 60% of the jobs to be created are expected to require TVET-related skills (Economic Planning Unit, 2015). TVET is identified as a driving driver for Malaysia to produce skilled human capital. The aspiration of the Malaysian government to get the source of labour from within Malaysia which excels in various fields can be realized if every generation of the nation comes from an excellent home management.

Women Involvement in Work Force

Social and economic changes have expanded the role of women from mothers and wives to working women. The factors contributing to women's involvement in the field of employment are due to higher educational opportunities and economic demand for a country (Reddy, Vranda, Ahmed, Nirmala, & Siddaramu, 2010). The involvement of women in employment in Malaysia has increased from 53.7% in 2014 to 54.1% in 2015 (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2016). Furthermore, the increasing number of women in the labour market requires women with family to balance their work and responsibilities which can lead to stress in order to meet both.

Work-life Balance

The origin of work-life balance issue arises when studies on women having multiple roles in managing works and families (Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno & Tillemann, 2011). Since then work-life balance has become among the subject matters that been studied by various groups. In general, there is no single definition on work-life balance (Wickham, Parker & Fishwick, 2006). Clark (2000) defines work-family balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (p. 751).

Byrne (2005) suggested eight important sections of life as indicators for work-life balance. The sections are work, finances, spiritual, hobbies,

self, social, family and health. According to Byrne, all these eight sections of life are important. To have work-life balance, each individual attempts to achieve a balance amongst these different sections.

Lack of work-life balance thus influences working individual's performance at workplace as well as in personal and family life. In the current economic scenario, work requirements have caused stress to employees as organizations are hard pressed for higher productivity. Various studies have discovered that productivity at work place is related to work-life balance where an employee with better work-life balance will contribute more meaningfully outcome towards the organizational growth and success (Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno & Tillemann, 2011). Work-life balance emerges when work and family are synergistic and can complement each other. The positive side of the work-life is it can enhance the well-being of the work and family units. Work-family balance was also defined by Clark (2000) as an absence of work-family conflict or increasing levels of work-family enrichment.

Work-Life Conflict

Clark (2000) and Voydanoff (2005) argued that work and family are the two most important domains in people's lives and as a result, work and family can cause conflict if they compete with each other. Fatimah (1985) conducted a study on the role of women and occupational conflicts. According to her research, the high expectations of the community towards women in fulfilling their responsibilities caused the working-women at large to experience role-strain if they fail to perform every role they hold. Role strain refers to situations where one feels difficult to fulfil their role. Women will usually work to fulfil their role as wives and mothers to ensure and secure a harmonious family. However, there are working women who cannot perform that role properly which ended up causing psychological, mental and emotional stress.

A lot of studies have been conducted to identify factors contribute to work-life conflict faced by working women. Delina and Raya (2013) set factors such as length of working time, work involvement and family responsibilities contributed to conflicts faced by working women to achieve work-life balance.

Das and Kushwaha (2013) set out five factors contribute to the imbalance between career and life, there are workplace factors, families and personal commitments, work contexts, issues relating to specific situations

and assistance programs from employers. All these factors have been categorized into four parts: 1) workplace facilities 2) social commitment 3) workplace situation and 4) workplace support. The first factor of workplace facilities is the most significant (mean = 14.58) in influencing the level of stress in life that leads to family-career imbalance.

According to Reddy et al. (2010), workplace atmosphere plays an important role in contributing to family-work conflicts. Employment characteristics that contribute to stress are like working hours of the week, overtime, overtime work, unemployed employers, and non-employee-oriented organizational culture. In addition, conceptual work pressure can be categorized into 1) role conflicts; 2) overloaded workload; 3) scalable work scope. Each of the three categories can contribute to work pressure which ultimately leads to domestic conflicts.

Social Support for Working Women

Pleck (1977) stated that men had more problems at work where it eventually affects the family. As for women, they often experience conflicts where the tensions of the family affect their workplace performances. Das and Kushwaha (2013) found that family-work conflicts are more prevalent than work-family conflicts. Hence, social support from families, employers, services and facilities from various organizations are important in helping those working women to balance their responsibilities between works and families and also to reduce stress.

Smith and Gardner (2007) conducted a study to identify the employees' benefits which could help them in balancing their lives. The most frequent benefits utilized by employees are flexible work hours, leaves to attend personal functions, paid leave and medical leave. Whereas the most favoured benefit by women employees is to be able to work from home. Availability of internet and up-to-date telecommunication facilities make this possible. This shows that women are actually requiring more time spent at home with their families.

Generally the basic theory of human capital stipulates that among the factors contributing to the development of human capital is such as the original capability (since birth or due to basic education / family / heredity / ethnic background), formal learning, learning and training and the influence of individual life before entering work environment and good health (Grossman, 2000). A research made by Gunderson *et. al* (2013) also found that the development of a child at the age of 1-3 years could shape the

development of attitudes and motivations of an individual in the upcoming five years. The development of the attitude and motivations of an individual are closely related to the physical and spiritual education received from the parents in the early stages of the development of children. Individual excellence can be cultivated through a brilliant and happy family. If a country can provide perfect infrastructure and services to create a harmonious family, the family will be able to continuously produce a brilliant generation.

METHODOLOGY

Initially this study planned to involve a total of 100 respondents with 50 of them are working at the administrative level while the rest 50 are at the non-professional level. However, due to problems in collecting the distributed questionnaires, a total of 76 respondents with 52 are in non-professional level and 24 are professionals are used for this study. The targeted population is the working women with families in Pulau Pinang which are full-time workers as civil servant and having at least one child of either group (secondary school, primary school, kindergarten, or infant). The sampling method use is by convenience sampling. Data was collected at Tun Abdul Razak Complex (KOMTAR) located in George Town, Pulau Pinang. The study was conducted at KOMTAR as it houses various central government offices and agencies, state governments, and local authorities in one building. The most easily accessible government departments and agencies within the building are selected by researchers.

This study involves descriptive study design. It is used to identify issues and challenges faced by married working women in managing their work-life balance and the extent to which those challenges can be solved by having good social support services and infrastructure. This study involves two types of data: primary data and secondary data. The primary data is obtained from the questionnaire forms distributed to the respondents while the secondary data is obtained from the previous studies, reference books, journals, resources from government departments and agencies related to this study. The questionnaires are organized in 4 sections of A, B, C, and D.

Generally, Section A consists of questions related to respondent's profile, respondent's family profile, and respondent's job profile, while Section B involves several questions on family and work environment faced by respondents. Questions in this B are answered based on Likert scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=less agreeable, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Section C consist of questions regarding the respondent's ability to

balance their family and work as well as the activities carried out to achieve balance in the respondent's life. The last section involves questions regarding the suggestions on social support services and infrastructure needed in order to improve work-life balance.

Objectives of this study are to determine whether married women working in the public sector are able to sustain work-life balance and to elicit their views and suggestions on the support system such as supporting infrastructure, social support and services needed to improve their work-life balance.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Based on the general question related to work-life balance, the study discovers that only 14.5% of respondents are unable to balance their work and family life. This indicates that most of the respondents are able to manage both their work and family life. The finding is based on the following analysis:

Managing daily housework

Table 1 presents the management of routine housework either by a respondent herself or with the help of the husband. The findings show that women are more likely to do the housework like housekeeping, sweeping and wiping floor, as well as washing, ironing and folding clothes, cooking, or even managing the needs of their kids. While husbands usually manage on buying the home essentials, drying clothes, cleaning the toilet, and attending school activities.

Table 1.

Managing Daily Housework

No	List of routine housework	Self-managed by respondent	Managed by husband
	Buying home essentials	28 (36.8%)	48 (63.2%)
	Housekeeping	51 (67.1%)	25 (32.9%)
	Sweeping floor	49 (64.5%)	27 (35.5%)

Wiping floor	42 (55.3%)	34 (44.7%)
Washing clothes	41 (53.9%)	35 (46.1%)
Drying clothes	34 (44.7%)	42 (55.3%)
Ironing clothes	57 (75.0%)	19 (25.0%)
Folding clothes	61 (80.3%)	15 (19.7%)
Cleaning the toilet	33 (43.4%)	43 (56.6%)
Cooking	68 (89.5%)	8 (10.5%)
Taking care of children's needs in the morning during working days	65 (85.5%)	11 (14.5%)
Taking care of children's needs at home after working hours	60 (78.9%)	16 (21.1%)
Checking children's homework	39 (51.3%)	37 (48.7%)
Attending school activities (sports day, academic achievement day, PIBG meeting, etc.)	25 (32.9%)	51 (67.1%)
The needs of a child when they are awake in the middle of the night	47 (61.8%)	29 (38.2%)

Work and family environment and quality of life

Various factors contributing to work-life balance among working women had been examined in this study. This involves family environment (family-related factors) as well as work environment (job-related factors). Both factors consists of 4 aspects respectively. Table 2 presents the relationship between family and work environment towards the balance quality between those two. The reported P-values are obtained by independent t-test to look for the relationship of each aspect to the quality of family and work balance. Mean score in either group of work and family balance indicates the response from the respondents. Based on the analysis, there are significant mean difference for the aspect of household management ($P=0.013$) and quality time with family ($P<0.001$) in family environment factor. The mean scores for the aspects of household management and quality time with family are higher among respondents who feel that they are not able to balance their family and work. No significant mean difference is reported for work environment factor.

Table 2.*Family and Work Environment with Work-Life Balance Quality*

Aspect	Family and work balance		P-values
	Yes	No	
Family environment			
Kids/husband management	11.35 (1.71)	11.29 (1.89)	0.926
Household management	10.26 (1.70)	12.00 (1.83)	0.013*
Quality time with family	9.16 (1.77)	11.86 (1.22)	<0.001*
Emotion	9.33 (1.66)	9.57 (2.23)	0.724
Work environment			
Working hour	10.76 (1.70)	10.71 (2.14)	0.945
Workload	8.59 (1.82)	9.57 (1.81)	0.181
Working pressure	9.30 (1.67)	10.29 (1.50)	0.138
Social support and emotion	12.03 (1.37)	10.86 (3.08)	0.355

*Significant P-value (<0.10)

Housework management and quality time with family

Since there were significant mean difference of household management and the quality time with family in family environment factor, there is a need to look for which statements contribute to this significance of the results. Table 3 shows the relationship of the household management and quality time with family towards the family and work balance. The reported P-values are also obtained by independent t-test to look for the relationship of each aspect with the quality of family and work balance.

For the aspect of household management, the significant means are reported for the following statements “I really need a maid to help managing the housework.” (P=0.021) and “Weekends are often spent by doing housework which were postponed on weekdays.” (P=0.009). The mean scores are higher among those who feel that they are not able to balance their family and work. Hence, most respondents without family-work balance agreed that they need maids (mean=3.29) and their weekends are always spent for doing housework (mean=4.71).

In another aspect of quality time with family, the significant means

are reported for the statements “I find it difficult to socialize/spend quality time with my family due to workloads” ($P=0.003$) and “Children often complain that I did not spend much time with them” ($P<0.001$). The reported means are higher among those respondents who feel that they are not able to balance their family and work. Thus, they strongly agree that workloads do affect their quality time with family.

However, there is no significant mean difference reported for the following statements: “My spouse often helps in managing the housework” and “I always ensure that I can attend family or school programs that require parents’ involvement.

Table 3.

Household Management and Quality Time with Family

Statements	Family and work balance		P-values
	Yes	No	
Household management			
I really need a maid to help managing the housework.	2.25 (1.08)	3.29 (1.38)	0.021*
Weekend are often spent by doing housework that were postponed on weekdays.	3.84 (0.84)	4.71 (0.49)	0.009*
My spouse often helps in managing the housework.	4.18 (0.96)	4.00 (1.00)	0.640
Quality time with family			
I find it difficult to socialize/spend quality time with my family due to workloads.	2.59 (1.06)	3.86 (0.69)	0.003*
Children often complain that I did not spend much time with them.	2.41 (0.97)	3.86 (0.90)	<0.001*
I always ensure that I can attend family or school programs that require parents' involvement.	4.16 (0.58)	4.14 (0.69)	0.929

*Significant P-value (<0.05)

In summary, for household management, women feel that their spouses often help and they do not see the needs of having maid at home. By getting help from spouses, working mothers can concentrate in managing their work and are able to handle their work-family conflict better. However, their weekend are mostly spent for doing housework that are postponed during the working days. Women also have good quality time with their families since they often able to attend any family or school events, and their children rarely complain that they did not spent time with them.

Social support suggested to improve work-life balance

The needs of services and infrastructure of social support are necessary for employees to obtain better balance quality of work and family life. Based on the findings in this study, most of the women indicate that several services of social supports are really necessary including leave policies, dependent day care, flexible working hours, as well as support and information services. Example of necessary leave policies are emergency leave, maternal leave, personal leave, long-term leave with specific purpose, and others. For dependent care centers, women felt that childcare center is necessary but parents' day care is not necessary to be in the office. For support and information services, they found a necessity of having family events, nursery room facilities, a counseling service and Employee Assistance Program (EAP), as well as seminars, workshops, and family training in balancing the role of family and work. Table 4 presents the list of suggested work benefits that can help in balancing the work and family balance. The statements were answered according to the Likert scale as follow. Refer to table 4.

Table 4.*Work benefits and Family Balance*

Question	Statement	Mean	SD
Leave policies			
	Medical leave	2.97	0.23
	Maternity leave	2.97	0.23
	Personal leave	2.97	0.16
	Medical leave for family	2.95	0.23
	Miscarriage leave	2.92	0.36
	Emergency leave	2.92	0.27
	Leave for the family death case	2.97	0.16
	Long-term leave with specific purpose	2.76	0.49
Dependent care centers			
	Child care center	2.86	0.48
	Parents' day care center	2.45	0.76
Working hours			
	Flexible working hours	2.83	0.47
	Permission to "come late" or "leave early" for some reason	2.82	0.42
	Permission to leave office during working hours for some important family affairs	2.87	0.34
	Flexible break time	2.76	0.54
Support and information services			
	Facilities for families in the office	2.38	0.71
	Organizing family day	2.83	0.44
	Counseling service and Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	2.72	0.58
	Nursery room	2.74	0.55
	Seminar, workshop, and family training on balancing work and family life	2.72	0.60

Table 5.*Consultant when having Family and Work Related Issues*

No.	Consultant	Family/personal issue	Work-related issue
1.	Not sharing to anyone	19 (25.0%)	9 (11.8%)
2.	Husband	54 (71.1%)	35 (46.1%)

3.	Close friend	26 (34.2%)	30 (39.5%)
4.	Parents	36 (47.4%)	11 (14.5%)
5.	Colleague	18 (23.7%)	40 (52.6%)
6.	Group of friends	1 (1.3%)	12 (15.8%)
7.	Religious group	13 (17.1%)	6 (7.9%)
8.	Family member	5 (6.6%)	7 (9.2%)
9.	Counselor	6 (7.9%)	9 (11.8%)
10.	Employer/supervisor	3 (3.9%)	30 (39.5%)

Consultant/Social supports

Table 5 presents a list of individuals or groups that working women would consult or refer to if they encounter family or work-related issues. The data is recorded by frequency and percentage (%). When there are family or personal issues, most of the respondents often refer to their husbands, parents, and close friends. Whereas when they are facing work-related issues, most of them prefer to refer to their colleagues first, followed by their husbands, close friends as well as their employer/supervisor.

Table 6.

Spiritual Activity and Support Group (n=76)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you think that the spiritual activity can help in reducing stress?		
Helpful	70	92.1
Not sure	4	5.3
Not helpful	2	2.6
Do you need a support group in dealing with your conflicts?		
Yes	51	67.1
No	25	32.9

Based on Table.6, majority of respondents admit that the spiritual activity can help in reducing their stress (92.1%), and more than half of them strongly need support group to help in dealing with conflicts (67.1%). There are 61 of them (80.3%) feel that they are able to balance their work and family. In summary, most of the respondents involved in this study are having well-balanced of family and work life.

CONCLUSION

The study has discovered that in general married working women who are working in the public sector are not confronted with work-life conflict. This is reflected from the findings that most of the respondents agree that they are able to balance their work and family life. The main reason is because their spouses often help them with their housework. The respondents are also having good quality time with their families. This is reflected through their regular attendance to any family or school events, and their children rarely complain that they did not spent time with them. Services, facilities and social supports suggested by respondents to improve their work-life balance are leave policies, flexible working hours, as well as support and information services.

The above findings may not be relevant to married women working in private sector as their nature of work, work environment and requirement are different than those working in a public sector. Therefore, further studies are essential to secure and enrich the understanding and awareness on the overall issues of work-life balance among married working women in Malaysia. The overall information would be embraced to fabricate and formulate a more comprehensive work-life balance model.

These benefits of more intensive and extensive studies on work-life balance are not only for the improvement in social and psychological aspects of effected group but also in economic sector as women are needed to fulfill the needs of country's employment. This is the primary reason why global and proactive organizations have leveraged work-life balance programs to improve productivity and profitability and also to gain higher employee engagement.

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