Unwrapping the Work Life Balance of Female Academics in Bangladesh Through Contemporary Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance of working women is getting much attention by the researchers since an increased number of women are getting into the labor force. Female academics, along with women employed in other sectors struggle often to resolve the conflict between their role in the family and at the workplace because of the excessive job demands and family responsibilities. However, the experiences of female academics is highly ignored in the academic discourse of WLB. Investigating the perspectives of female academics in this area is crucial given the enormous effects that work-life balance may have on their wellbeing and organizational success. Under this backdrop, this book aims to unveil the dimensions of work-life balance for female academics in Bangladesh exploring both work and family related factors that have influenced their work life balance and work family conflict.

The findings of this book suggest that factors from both family and work domains have a mostly negative effect on the WLB of the female academics. The findings suggest that inadequate support from the workplace plays a crucial role in limiting women academics' ability to manage work and family demands. Poor toilet facilities and a lack of personal office space encourage female university teachers to take their work home, which in effect disrupts the equilibrium between their work and home. A field investigation of this study has also found no formal childcare center is offered, neither in the university, nor by the government or private authority. This book has also shown how the ability of female academics to balance their work and family obligations is constrained by weak relationships, poor teamwork, and a lack of empathy from their coworkers. Poor coordination among colleagues has been exacerbated by the limited opportunity for interaction with the colleagues. Finally, the available support from household helping hands and factors that influence their availability have an impact. The respondents of this study have reported poor availability of household helping hands in recent times because of the poor wage and

benefits, undefined service time, and lack of weekdays they were provided for a long time.

The book concludes with recommending proper toilet and office room facilities for female teachers, establishing Child Care Centers, reforming parental leave policy, and formalizing the job of the domestic labor force in order to make it easy for the female academics to balance between work and family domains.

DECLARATION

I certify that this research report does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously published or written by another except where due reference is made in the text.

Faraha Nawaz

ACRONYMS

WLB	Work-life balance
WFC	Work Family Conflict
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
IT	Information Technology
CEPZ	Chittagong Export Processing Zone
BPO	Business process outsourcing
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
RU	University of Rajshahi
PUST	Pabna University of Science and Technology

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Work-life balance (WLB) is the capacity to strike a balance between the demands of work and personal life that enables people to meet their obligations at work while also having time and energy to partake in other activities that are important to them, such as spending time with friends and family, pursuing hobbies, and taking care of themselves. It's crucial to strike a healthy work-life balance as it improves physical and mental well-being of a person by lowering their risk of stress, burnout, and other health issues, improves productivity and job performance, improves relationships with family and friends, and ensures their personal growth and development. WLB is often a result of an individual's attempts to resolve the conflict between her role in the family and at the workplace.

Work-life balance has become a crucial issue for both individuals and organizations in recent years. It can be quite difficult for people to achieve a sense of balance and well-being when the pressure to succeed in one's work is paired with the obligations of family and personal life. WLB of working women is getting much attention by the researchers since an increased number of women are getting into the labor force. From the year 1991 to 2021, women's labor force participation in Bangladesh has risen from 27% to 35% (World Bank, 2022). In this case, female academics particularly struggle to strike a balance between their personal and professional obligations due to their excessive job demands. In addition, academic jobs require an individual to invest extra time in research, which is crucial for their career growth. This puts the female academics into an extraordinary pressure which they struggle to manage given their roles in the family. However the experiences of female academics is highly ignored in the academic discourse of WLB.

According to research, women are subject to the triple work burden since they are engaging in paid employment, which makes it very difficult for them to manage all their responsibilities properly (Moser, 1993; Intesar, 2021). Women in academia frequently shoulder a "double weight" of obligations to their families and their careers, which can have an effect on their output, job happiness, and general well-being. Additionally, working women experience bias and discrimination at work, which makes it even harder for them to reconcile their personal and professional lives. There is a growing volume of literature on work-life balance for working women in different sectors (Ahmed et al., 2022; Uddin & Chowdhury, 2015; Kumari and Devi, 2015; Sultana & Chatterjee, 2019; Al Mamun, 2020; Pahuja, 2016). However, existing studies rarely take into consideration the experiences of female academics (Al Mamun, 2022020; Kumarid Devi, 2015). Thus, more studies on the experiences of female academics are needed.

Investigating the perspectives of female academics in this area is crucial given the enormous effects that work-life balance may have on their wellbeing and organizational success. By investigating the work-life balance experiences of female academics and examining the elements that contribute to their success or difficulty in reaching balance, this book intends to fill this gap in the literature. In doing so, this book seeks to raise awareness of the particular difficulties female academics face in striking a work-life balance in both the work and the family domain. Finally, this study offers suggestions for organizations and policymakers to promote their productivity and well-being.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As people look to balance their professional and personal duties in order to maintain their well-being and accomplish their goals, the quest for work-life balance has become an increasingly popular concern in recent years. Female academics suffer special difficulties juggling their demanding academic jobs with their personal lives, making this topic more apparent for them. Despite the increasing awareness of this problem, there is still a paucity of research on work-life balance for female academics, and there are few studies that provide a thorough knowledge of the elements that

influence this ability. The productivity and efficiency of academic institutions, the productivity and inclusivity of the academic profession, and the wellbeing of female academics are all significantly impacted by this knowledge gap.

The growing body of literature on work family conflict (WFC) and WLB accommodate the experience and challenges experienced by women employed in different sectors ranging from industry to IT sector, Banking sector, medical sector and education sector (Al Mamun, 2022020; Kumarid Devi, 2015; Ahmed et al., 2022; Uddin & Chowdhury, 2015; Sultana & Chatterjee, 2019; Pahuja, 2016; Mone et al., 2019). Very few of these studies that have integrated the experience of female educators have taken into consideration school teachers and not those teaching at the universities. One study by Kumari & Devi (2015) has explored the experience of female college teachers. However, it lacks a comprehensive analysis of the factors leading to WFC and hindering WLB of female academics and was conducted in India. Furthermore, the existing scholarship of WLB in Bangladesh context has widely ignored an individual's capacity to effectively address their work and family demands which is central to WLB.

The situation explained above calls for new studies to analyze the WLB of female academics exploring rigorously the factors from both workplace and family. Moreover, an individual's capacity to effectively manage her job and family demands also require serious consideration as it is one of the key factors of WLB. Under this context, this book is designed to better understand how female academics manage their work and personal lives by looking at the institutional, cultural, and individual elements that affect their experiences, views, and coping mechanisms. The book specifically aims to answer the following research questions.

1.3 Objectives

The purpose of the proposed research is to unveil the dimensions of work-life balance for working women in Bangladesh. In achieving the purpose of the proposed research, the following specific objectives have been set:

1. To explore the work and family related factors that affect work life balance among working women in Bangladesh

2. To explore whether and if so then how work life balance impacts on rearing and caring of children.

3. To explore and understand how fathers are involved in child care and housework in order to better understand work and life balance issues in Bangladeshi families.

4. To identify if the work-life balance of working women scenario is different with respect to marital status, family structure and nature of work. If so, then how.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the work and family related factors that influence work life balance among working women in Bangladesh?

2. How does women's involvement in work outside the home impact the rearing and caring of children?

3. What is the father's role in household work and child care when women work outside the home?

4. Do various factors, such as marital status, family structure and nature of work affect work life balance?

1.5 Significance of the book

This research on the work-life balance of female academics is important for a variety of reasons. The need for a study on women's work-life balance in academia stems from the fact that academic careers are notoriously demanding and can make it challenging for those who work in them to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Due to gender preconceptions and expectations, female academics in particular confront additional difficulties, such as caregiving tasks and domestic chores, which can make it challenging for them to strike a balance between their professional and

personal life. Increased stress, burnout, and job discontent may result from this, which may eventually affect overall job performance and quality of life.

The significance of the book can be argued as follows -

Firstly, women are disproportionately impacted by the difficulties of work-life balance, especially in academic careers. Academic women are more likely to face particular obstacles due to gender discrimination and bias, which can make it even harder to strike a healthy work-life balance. Thus, it is crucial to look at how female academics combine their work and personal lives and to understand the difficulties they encounter. In this regard, the book offers insightful information about the particular difficulties faced by female academics, such as those involving job overload, a lack of institutional support, gender bias, and discrimination.

Secondly, existing studies on WLB of working women have demonstrated that a lack of work-life balance can result in elevated stress levels, burnout, and diminished job satisfaction, all of which can have a detrimental effect on the performance and output of female academics. Therefore, this book is important to promote female academics' well-being, enhance their performance, and eventually improve their retention in the profession by understanding the difficulties they confront in establishing work-life balance.

Thirdly, a research on the work-life balance of female academics can shed important light on the particular difficulties this group encounters, including the effects of cultural norms and gender expectations, as well as the methods they employ to strike a balance between their professional and personal lives. The findings can influence policies and interventions that can help female academics achieve work-life balance, like flexible work schedules and mentoring programs, by recognizing these problems and coping mechanisms.

Finally, the book can also pinpoint the coping mechanisms used by female academics to reconcile their obligations in both work and personal life. This information is helpful for institutions and policymakers trying to encourage better work-life balance for women in academia. The book can aid in the formulation of plans and guidelines to assist female academics in striking a

better work-life balance, which can enhance job satisfaction, physical and mental health, and general well-being.

1.6 Outline of the research report

This book provides a comprehensive analysis of different factors that influence the WLB of female university teachers in Bangladesh. To express this issue elaborately, this book is designed in following five chapters-

Chapter One- Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research, including a background of the issue, a statement of the research problem, research objectives and questions, and the rationale for the study. The limitations of this study are also presented in this chapter, as justification is given for the selection of this particular research topic among a range of existing problems. The background of the issue is explained by drawing evidence of working women from different backgrounds and fields, capturing their struggle to manage the demands of the workplace and home. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to provide an overview scenario of the work-family conflict of working women, paying special attention to those from academia. In the justification of this book, knowledge gaps in existing literature and the poor representation of female academics in the existing WLB scholarship are highlighted.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical aspects of the study. In this chapter, the key concepts of the study are defined and operationalized. After an elaborate literature review, some major theories relevant to Work conflict and Work-Life balance are critically discussed in order to lay the theoretical foundation for the study. The inappropriateness of some theories for this study is highlighted. And at the same time, an appropriate theoretical framework for this study is identified. The literature review revealed knowledge gaps in the existing literature. Finally, a conceptual model is developed and presented in this chapter to guide the study. The conceptual

model is explained, and the relationships between the major concepts are articulated in this chapter.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology of this study. It includes the sources of data, research methods, research design, research sites, sampling methods, research processes, problems encountered during data collection, and ethical considerations. Two universities from northern Bangladesh were chosen for the study, based on their suitability in terms of location, availability of respondents, and accessibility. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the study. Primary data were collected by interviewing female university teachers, their spouses, family members, and domestic workers. Qualitative research methods are applied to conduct this study. Empirical data are collected using in-depth interviews, and non-participant observation methods. Case stories of this study are obtained through in-depth interviews with the study respondents. Data are validated by applying triangulation data collection methods, and the data analysis techniques used are also discussed in this chapter. This chapter concludes with the ethical consideration of data collection and the limitations and barriers experienced to collect field data.

Chapter Four: Work Related Factors of Work Life Balance

This chapter summarizes some of the key findings of the contemporary study in the light of key objectives of this research. This chapter analyzes different work related factors that influences the work-life balance of the female university teachers in Bangladesh. This chapter is divided into two broad parts. The first part begins with the data relating to the personal profiles of the respondents. This section showcases data on the age, marital status, and average number of children of the respondents, average age of the children, presence of elderly family member, and the occupation of the husbands of the respondents of the study. In the second section, the chapter explores how work related factors influence the work family conflict and work life balance of female academics. WLB of female academics is analyzed by observing their working hour, nature of job and job demands,

flexible work schedule, workplace environment, organizational culture, and the relationship with and support from co-workers.

Chapter Five: Family Related Factors of Work Life Balance

This chapter explores the family related factors of work life balance of female university teachers. These factors commonly expresses the level of support female academics receive from the family domains. Findings in this issue has been organized into the support in child rearing and caring, support from spouse, support from elderly family members and the availability of support from the informal domestic workers. Analysis of this chapter explores both positive and negative sides of having elderly members in the family and the factors that influence the availability of help from the domestic workers.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Policy Suggestion

This chapter concludes the study by highlighting the key findings, the contribution of this research in addressing gaps in the existing body of knowledge, proposing some policy suggestions and finally pinpointing some areas they require further investigation for further research in the future. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes the key findings outlined in previous chapters. The second section discusses how these findings fit into the current body of knowledge and highlights how they confirm, add to and/or vindicate existing theories. The third section of this chapter provides some policy recommendations to resolve some of the burning issues that hinders female academics to achieve a greater balance in the family and work domain.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

After conducting an extensive review of the existing literature, in this chapter, theoretical and conceptual models have been proposed to guide the current study. The present chapter begins with defining and operationalizing the key concepts of this study and moves forward to a critical discussion on the theoretical, methodological, and empirical gaps in the existing WLB scholarship. Analyzing the gaps in the existing body of knowledge, a theoretical and conceptual model have been proposed to guide the conduct of the present study. The discussions and arguments made in this chapter highlight how the present study will add value to the existing scholarship and how it will add new insights into the theoretical debates over issues related to the WLB of working women.

2.1 Operationalization of the key concepts

This section elaborately discusses the key concepts of this study in the light of existing scholarly works and captures the true essence of these concepts by analyzing different meanings associated with them. This section then proceeds to operationalize the key concepts in the context of the present study. Concepts discussed in the following section includes- Work family conflict, work-life balance, working women, and household economy.

2.1.1 Work Family Conflict

Work-family conflict is a prevalent phenomenon that ensues when the demands and expectations of work and family life are incongruous, leading to difficulties in managing the duties and obligations of both domains. It is a type of inter-role conflict that arises due to the conflicting nature of the

roles played in both the work and family settings, giving rise to feelings of stress, dissatisfaction, and negative outcomes in one or both domains (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, pp. 77). Work-family conflict refers to the tension and struggle that individuals experience when the expectations and demands of their work and family roles are incompatible with each other. In essence, fulfilling obligations in one domain can hinder fulfilling obligations in the other domain, leading to difficulty balancing the competing demands of work and family roles. This can have negative consequences for both the work and family domains, and can be a source of stress and dissatisfaction for individuals. Lo Presti et al. (2020) defined work-family conflict as the degree to which fulfilling the work role impedes the fulfillment of the family role.

In the context this book, the concept of work-life (or alternatively, work-family) conflict has been used to refer to the struggle an individual goes through to fulfill his responsibilities in both the work and family domains, and his/her success in one domain leads to his/her struggle in another. Three types of conflict have been identified within the framework of conflict theory by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). These include time-based conflict, stress-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. A similar view is expressed by Morris and Madsen (2007) who have stated that when resources are allocated to one domain, the availability of resources in another domain decreases. This book measures work-life conflict in the light of time, resource, and behavioral factors.

2.1.2 Work Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to the state of equilibrium between an individual's responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside of work. This balance is achieved when the proportion of time and effort dedicated to each domain is appropriate for the individual (Pradhan, 2016). It is defined by Kirchmeyer (2000) as the achievement of fulfilling experiences in the different aspects of life that require various resources, like energy, time, and commitment, and these resources are spread across all the domains. Work-life balance is oftentimes compared to the similar term work-family balance, but the former term incorporates other roles like community, social, religious, and leisure roles taken up by an individual. (Cited in Khateeb,

2021). Another perspective on this concept, as held by the conflict and enrichment theorists, refers to work-family balance as either the absence of work-family conflict or the increase of work-family enrichment. The ideal work-life balance varies across different stages of a person's life, such as before or after marriage, having children, starting a career or retiring. Therefore, there is no perfect or universal work-life balance that fits everyone (Pradhan, 2016).

Following table incorporates different scholarly definitions of this concept-

Table 2.1- Scholarly definitions of Work-family Balance

Author (year)	Definition
Clark (2000)	"Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict"
Pillinger (2001)	"The flexible working arrangements that allow the employees to avail of working arrangements that provide a balance between work responsibilities and personal responsibilities."
Frone (2003)	"Low levels of conflict and high levels of inter role facilitation represent work family balance"
Grzywacz & Carlson (2007)	"Accomplishment of role related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role related partners in the work and family domains"
Emslie & Hunt (2009)	"Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict"
Delecta, (2011)	"An individual's ability to meet their work commitments as well as other non-work and family commitments."

Source: Adopted from (Kumer & Janakiram, 2017; Singh, 2014 as cited in Bello and Tanko 2020)

Drawing from the scholarly definitions of WLB, the book has taken this concept to mean the state of balance between work and personal responsibilities, where the time and effort dedicated to each domain is

appropriate for the individual. Work-family balance can be seen as either the absence of work-family conflict or the increase of work-family enrichment. Additionally, WLB leads to satisfaction, performance improvement, and a high level of inter role facilitation by enabling a person to achieve their work and non-work commitments.

2.1.3 Working women

"Working woman" is a term used to describe a female who is employed or engaged in any form of paid work or job, whether full-time or part-time, in any field or industry. This term distinguishes women who are involved in paid work outside of the home from those who are primarily engaged in domestic work, such as caregiving or homemaking. Working women may have a range of job titles and responsibilities, and may work in a variety of industries and sectors, including business, education, healthcare, technology, and many others.

Moser's Triple Role Theory (1993) has attempted to map gender division of labor by analyzing women's participation in the household, community, and external labor market. In her opinion, women are expected to play reproductive and caregiving roles, productive roles or income generating activities, and community roles. These roles are interrelated and may conflict with each other. Women in developing countries face various constraints, including lack of education, cultural norms, and limited access to resources, which affect their ability to balance these roles. In the light of Moser's view, working women are those women who perform productive roles along with reproductive and community roles.

In the context of the present study, working women are those who are engaged in paid employment and/or other forms of income generating activities. Women's participation in the external labor market was one of the primary determinants that was taken into consideration while selecting the study population. In addition, working women's involvement in other roles, as expressed by Moser (1997) was given minimal attention as well. Thus, working women, in this book, are those who are employed in the productive sector and are likely but not necessarily involved in other familial and caregiving roles and community responsibilities.
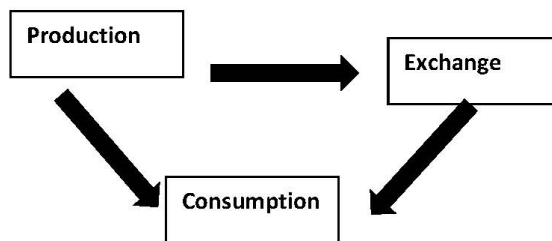
2.1.4 Household economy

The household economy refers to the economic activities and resources managed within a household or family unit, including the income earned by household members, expenses such as food, shelter, and other necessities, and the allocation and management of resources within the household. It encompasses both the monetary and non-monetary contributions of household members, including unpaid work such as caregiving, household maintenance, and subsistence farming.

The household economy operates within a larger market context and cannot be understood without a specific market context. Households rely on markets for various reasons, including purchasing manufactured goods, obtaining education and healthcare, increasing household income through specialized production, and engaging in paid or self-employment (Seaman, 2000). The key activities of household economy can be categorized broadly as follows-

1. The activities carried out by households, such as the work performed within the household, and other forms of labor.
2. The process of exchanging the goods produced by households, including labor, for other products and services.
3. The act of consuming the goods and services obtained through the exchange of household production and labor.

Figure 2.1: Functions of Household economy

Source: Adopted from Seaman (2000, p.10)

The household economy can have a significant impact on the work-life balance of working women. Women are often responsible for managing household chores and taking care of children or elderly family members, which can lead to a heavy workload and role overload. According to Nawaz and Mclaren (2016), women are responsible for reproductive work regardless of whether they also engage in productive work. Participation in paid labor does not diminish their responsibility for reproductive work. The United Nations (2010) stated that this burden of reproductive work, along with other pressures, limits the ability of many disadvantaged women who engage in productive work to work outside their homes. This increased burden can result in a lack of time and energy to focus on their work, leading to work-family conflicts and imbalance. In addition, financial constraints within the household can also impact a woman's ability to achieve work-life balance, as she may need to work longer hours or take on additional jobs to support the family. On the other hand, a stable and supportive household economy can provide women with the resources and support needed to manage their work and personal responsibilities, which can lead to better work-life balance. Therefore, it is important to consider the household economy when addressing work-life balance issues for working women.

2.1.5 External Labor Market

The external labor market refers to the overall labor market in which individuals search for job opportunities outside of their current organization. It includes all available job opportunities, employers, and job seekers in the broader labor market as well as jobs advertised publicly, recruitment agencies, job fairs, and other channels where potential employers look for candidates from outside their own organization. Research on external labor markets is typically focused on one of three labor arrangements: contingent employment, part-time employment, or contract labor (Snell, 2000).

2.2 Literature Review

Existing studies on the work-life balance of working women have explored the experiences of women employed in different sectors and revealed a number of work and family related factors that influence the work life balance of working women. Existing WLB literature on working women