Work-Life Balance of Mothers in Managerial Sector of Apparel Industry

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Work-life balance is a crucial topic for quality concern gurus, who believe that a balance between work and life is essential when it comes to carrying out daily work. The subject of work-life balance has gained more attention recently due to the reason that a person’s work life and family life may present conflicting demands on one another while the demands from both the globes are equally important. This is one of the most challenging issues being faced by the women in the 21st century. This problem is heightened for working mothers in the managerial sector because of the nature of the role they play at home; both as a spouse and a mother. The research problem addressed under this study is to investigate what factors affect the work-life balance of working mothers in the apparel sector. As this research topic is still in its exploratory stages, empirical research and other relevant literature are limited. Based on the available literature the researcher has identified three main factors that influence work-life balance of working mothers as: personal, work environmental, and home environmental factors. The research was carried out with individuals representing four main apparel companies in Sri Lanka. Further, both primary and secondary researches were carried out in order to critically explore “work-life balance” issue in the apparel sector. Accordingly, 10 working mothers in the managerial sector of the apparel industry were interviewed based on the interview guide that was developed. Thereafter the qualitative findings were analyzed using thematic analysis and were presented in a meaningful manner.

Keywords: home environment, personal factors, work environment, working women, work-life balance

Backdrop of the Study

Work-life balance is a contemporary subject in the modern society that has developed extensively over the past several decades. Various demographic factors in the world such as the speedy growth of women labour force participation, rise of dual earner families and the emergence of career oriented working mothers have led to such drastic changes (Thalagaspitiya, 2015). Jenson, Hagen, and Reddy (1988) referred to this trend as the “feminization of the labour force”.

Work life and family life are interrelated and interdependent. Spending more time in the work place,
dealing with clients and the complexity of the job can interfere and affect the personal life of women, sometimes making it impossible to even complete the household chores. Managerial positions are psychologically demanding and are often associated with heavy workload, long working hours, target covering, and frequent travel. Many a time, successful working females, in pursuit for arrival to the top, work so hard, that they miss out on the real delights of life as stated by Frone (2003). Most developed countries such as the United Kingdom represent a relatively equitable distribution of role assignment across the male and female gender between the care giving and breadwinning roles in contrast to developing countries like Sri Lanka. However, in Sri Lanka, a society with more conservative values, role assignment tends to be more defined with both men and women performing some care giving and breadwinning roles, with the balance of care giving tilting towards women and the balance of breadwinning tilting towards men (Kottawatta, 2016).

The family is considered as a sphere which brings out more responsibilities for women rather than men in top positions. Hence women in managerial positions have more concerns regarding the family and the children rather than male counterparts (Blair-Loy, 2001). Further, Rodriguez (2011) states that female managers come across more problems than the male managers since they are expected to carry all the family responsibilities despite their employment status.

**Research Problem**

The work force in the apparel sector has been dominated by female employees and women seem to be more prominent, securing more than 80% of the share of employment. Though majority of the apparel sector workforce consists of women, they are mostly confined to the lower levels and men tend to dominate the higher management positions (Madurawala, 2017).

According to Dharmasiri and Gnanayudam (2008) this issue is mainly due to the inability of the women to balance a full time job and the household responsibilities at home. Further, it is stated that the commitment demonstrated by the managers in the apparel sector is at an unsatisfactory level. This is supported by the previous research (Kuruppu, 1995; Weerasuriya, 1996; Senanayake, 2007). Through the preliminary interviews that were conducted with the managers in the industry it has been discovered that the high control targets, last minute run for the shipments, inadequate human resource development lead to high labour turnover and absenteeism which ultimately lead to work-life balance concerns among this sector (Dharmasiri & Gnanayudam, 2008).

It is evident that there are many definitions and benefits of work-life balance and that it is an issue for female employees rather than the male counterparts. This is mainly due to the fact that women need to perform the key responsibilities at work as well as at home. Though there are many research carried out on work-life balance, very few had addressed the issues on work-life balance of female managers in the apparel sector in Sri Lanka. Hence the research study is carried out to know the status of work-life balance so that policy makers could address the issue properly through revising and devising required policies and strategies with a view to ensuring productive and sincere female employees in the managerial positions of the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.

**Research Objective**

To evaluate the personal, work environmental, and home environmental factors that influence work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial sector.
Literature Review

Work-life balance is a significant concept for a person’s wellbeing, work-related performance and for the effective functioning of the family or society (Grady, McCarthy, Darcy, & Kirrane, 2008). There has been ample discussion and debate on how work-life balance ought to be defined, measured, and researched (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Various researchers have used various terms to refer on “work-life balance”. For instance, Burke (2000) denotes the term as “work-personal life balance”; Clarke (2000), Frone (2003), Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003), and Clarke, Koch, and Hill (2004), denote as “work-family balance”; Grady et al. (2008) denote the term as “work-life balance”. Since “work-family balance” is more related to traditional society and since both the traditional and non-traditional factors are taken into consideration in this research study, the term “work-life balance” is carried throughout the study.

Work-life balance is assumed to be achieved when there is a separation of work and private life and that “balance” is achieved when there is an equal separation between the two globes (Khallash & Kruse, 2012). Work-life balance is a form of metaphor and an area of interest for those who are more involved in the quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life (Guest, 2001). It is argued that successfully balancing both work and family life can be challenging and will have an impact on an individual’s satisfaction in their work and family roles (Broers, 2005).

Theories of Work-Life Balance

Based on the various definitions, the researchers have come across numerous theories that describe the dynamics of work-life balance. Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) have suggested both negative sides of work-life components (work-life conflict) and positive sides of work-life components (work-life enrichment) to measure work-life balance in total.

Theories relating to negative side of work-life balance are role scarcity theory, spillover theory, role conflict theory, while the theories relating to positive side of work-life balance are role accumulation theory (Sieber, 1974), positive spillover theory (Crouter, 1984), expansion theory (Marks & MacDermid, 1996), work-life enrichment (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), work-life facilitation (Frone, 2003).

Factors of Work-Life Balance

Several research studies in both national and international setting have focused on factors which influence work-life balance. These factors can be broadly categorized based on the major dimensions namely personal (wellbeing and technology), work environmental (organizational support programs and job stress), and home environmental factors (spousal support and childcare responsibilities).

Research Question

How do personal, work environmental, and home environmental factors influence work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial sector?

Conceptual Framework

Based on the review of literature, one dependent variable: work-life balance, three independent variables: personal, work environmental, home environmental, and six dimensions were captured in the conceptual framework as per Figure 1.
Data Analysis

The analysis has been carried out through thematic analysis with 10 working women at managerial level aged between 30 to 45 years having one to three children. Also, mostly elderly parents stay with them in order to look after the children and these working mothers live close to their working places. Data Presentation—Demographic facts of the Individuals is given in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Details of Individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Highest educational qualification</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Years of experience in the apparel sector</th>
<th>No: 6 of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I/1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>MAS Holdings</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Account manager</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Brandix</td>
<td>CIM</td>
<td>Deputy manager</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Hydramani</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>MAS Holdings</td>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Deputy general manager</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hela</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Group management accountant</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>MAS Holdings</td>
<td>CGMA</td>
<td>Business manager</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Hela</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>General manager</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Brandix</td>
<td>Charted (CA)</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Brandix</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Assistant manager</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Hydramani</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis: (Stage A)—Coding of Material

The first phase of thematic analysis is the reduction of text from the data gathered. The purpose is to break the data into small segments so that it could be used for informative purposes. Under thematic analysis, coding framework enables to reduce the large sets of data into purposive and expressive data segments as given in Table 2.
Table 2  
**Coding Material in Thematic Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>7 out of the 10 individuals stated that work affects the wellbeing negatively while the rest stated that it all depends on time management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Out of the individuals, 8 are relying mostly on technology to carry out office work at home while the other 2 do not carry out office work at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work environmental factors</td>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>7 individuals get stressed out with work demands while rest can manage levels of stress at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational support programs</td>
<td>All the participants were lacking the ability to obtain flexible work hours in the apparel sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home environmental factors</td>
<td>Spousal support</td>
<td>7 out of the 10 individuals have supportive spouses who are concerned on wife’s career while the rest are not much supportive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare responsibilities</td>
<td>6 individuals have difficulties in managing the time to focus on childcare responsibilities while rest are able to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identification of Themes

Table 3 below depicts the abstracted themes which have been derived from the coded text segments.

Table 3  
**Summary of Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic theme</th>
<th>Organizing theme</th>
<th>Global theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many individuals do not maintain a proper mental and physical wellbeing.</td>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the individuals highly rely on technology to balance work and life.</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than half of the individuals are faced with job stress related to work demands.</td>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>Work environmental factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many individuals stated that the organizational support programs are limited and they prefer flexi work hours.</td>
<td>Organizational support programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority of individuals receive immense support from their spouses.</td>
<td>Spousal support</td>
<td>Home environmental factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than half of the individuals do not have time to focus on the responsibilities towards the children.</td>
<td>Childcare responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thematic Analysis (Stage B)—Construction of the Thematic Networks

Research study is comprised of three global themes: personal, work environmental, and home environmental factors, three organizational and six basic themes were identified.

**Global theme—Personal factors**

Personal factors in the global network comprise of two organizing themes namely wellbeing and technology as depicted in Figure 2. The network emphasizes the research participant’s conceptualizations in perspective of a wider discussion.

(1) Organizing theme—Wellbeing

As stated by the individuals, wellbeing is a vital aspect for work-life balance. The theme generates insights as to whether work impacts health or wellbeing in a positive or negative state.

**Basic theme—Negative responses on wellbeing**

It is evident that almost all the participants have stated that the amount of work load for the managerial level employees in the apparel sector has impacted their health and wellbeing in a negative manner. This is mainly due to the lack of time that they have, to consider about their own health and wellness.
“That’s very much true. Work affects health. I have a serious back pain issue. We work according to the same routine and the bad posture has led me to this concern. We don’t get a time to exercise daily so obviously when working we need to expect these.” (I/2) These individuals who are in top management positions hardly find any time for their own health and wellbeing due to the busy schedules and therefore they are faced with a greater imbalance in work and life domains.

(2) Organizing theme—Technology
The technology has created the ability for the working mothers to carry their office work at any place and at any time of the day.

Basic theme—Positive impact towards advancement in technology
Having analyzed the data, majority of the participants have stated that the advancement in technology has made their lives easier to manage.

“Until about five years back I had to come to office and sit at my desk all day long to do all the office related work. Sometimes now I can do work using my tab even if I go home early or if I get late to come.” (I/1) “You actually don’t have to be in the department to do your work unless you have to put your signature on a particular document. So I always use my iPad to do the office work and it’s very easy for me.” (I/6) Based on these statements it is clear that the rapid change in technology has created a drastic change in lives of the people and has enabled them to manage and work and life better.

Global theme—Work environmental factors
The thematic network of work environmental factors consists of three main organizing themes as depicted in Figure 3. The key factors that are emphasized include job stress, supervisory support, and organizational support programs.

(3) Organizing theme—Job stress
The theme focuses on whether the individuals in the managerial sector perceive the work environment as threatening or the conflicting.
Basic theme—Stress with regard to the work load

In terms of job stress, majority of the working mothers get stressed out due to the heavy workload prevailing in the apparel sector. Due to the high level of competition among the companies, high targets have been set for the managerial level employees which makes it difficult for them to strive a proper balance between work and life domains.

“Yes, of course, there are specific targets that we have been given as a team leader. So, I have to make sure my team performs to the expected level. So, if few members fail to achieve, it affects the whole team. At times when team target is not achieved there are instances where I have to stay back and help them sacrificing the time I can spend with my kids. It’s actually stressful.” (I/2)

Thus, it can be concluded that stress at work place is one of the principal factors which lead to a greater imbalance of the work and life spheres.

(4) Organizing theme—Organizational support programs

The theme analyses the favorable or unfavorable programs offered by the apparel companies which facilitate or obstruct the work-life balance of the working mothers.

Basic theme—Insufficient organizational support programs

Through the data gathered, it is evident that all the individuals were lacking the ability of obtaining flexible work hours in the apparel sector.

“There is some sort of flexibility in our sector. But for a working mother, I prefer if they come up with more flexi policies which make our lives much easier and smoother.” (I/5)

The individuals also prefer if they could work from home for a few days per week and if the companies could offer paternal leave. “There aren’t any written policies. But the company operates we have some flexibility in work and home life. I personally prefer to work from home at least for a few days per week.” (I/9)

Thus it is apparent that the limited amount of support programs in the apparel sector leads to an imbalance between work and life domains.
Global theme—Home environmental factors

As per Figure 4, the global theme consists of four main organizing themes, which mainly comprise of the support from the spouse and home-care workers, stress arising from family the responsibilities towards the children.

(5) Organizing theme—Spousal support

Spousal support is a broad theme which mainly focuses on identifying the level of support received from the husbands for the working mothers towards achieving a proper strike between work and life domains.

**Basic theme—Support towards achieving success**

Majority of the individuals have stated that their husbands are very much supportive towards achieving success in terms of work demands.

“My husband is of course supportive, he’s also from the same company but working in another SBU of ours. He’s a very much understanding person.” (I/1) “My Husband is a businessman so he understands about work commitment. If there is any urgent thing which I have to attend to, he allows me to do so even during the weekends.” (I/7)

This support provided by the spouses has enabled the working mothers to move up the career ladder and they have been their biggest strength for the individuals to come up to a managerial position. This support has facilitated the working mothers to manage and balance both work and family life with much ease.

(6) Organizing theme—Childcare responsibilities

The theme sheds light into how individuals manage the childcare responsibilities and how it influences work-life balance of the working mothers in the managerial sector.

**Basic theme—Less time devoted for childcare responsibilities**

As per the discussion held with the individuals, majority find it difficult to manage the childcare responsibilities due to the limited time that they have after coming from home from work.
“To be honest, I try my best to stay with the kids but with work as I said before they are more attached with our maids.” (I/1) “The amount of work I have to do is high so my parents look into the kids’ homework and other activities, so the involvement of my husband into their activities is very much less.” (I/3)

Due to the top management positions they are in, it is apparent that the individuals’ contribution towards childcare responsibilities has been limited and this has resulted in greater imbalance in work and life relationships.

**Thematic Analysis (Stage C)—Interpretation of Patterns**

The concluding step of thematic analysis is the interpretation of patterns and the presentation of the findings. As stated by the individuals, they have not been able to maintain a proper physical and mental wellbeing due to the limited time that they have in their lives. However, the factor is that technology has enabled the working mothers to carry out their office work load with less effort, at any given day and at any given time.

In terms of work environmental factors, job stress is considered to be a factor indirectly affecting the lives of the working mothers, mainly due to the heavy work load and tight deadlines in the apparel sector. As stated by the individuals, the organizational support programs provided by the apparel companies are limited, hence the individuals prefer if they could have flexible work hours which make work and life much smoother and easier to manage.

Based on the home environmental factors, the support from the spouse has a direct impact where they assist in moving up the career ladder. Also, the lack of time to focus on the responsibilities towards the childcare has led to an imbalance between work and life spheres. In conclusion, majority of the factors have direct impact while few other factors have an indirect impact towards perceived work-life balance.

**Achievement of the Objective**

The objective is to evaluate the personal, work environmental, and home environmental factors that influence work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial sector.

In relation to the personal factors, 70% of the individuals provided negative responses with regard to wellbeing mainly due to the inability to find time for their own health and wellness. Further, 80% of the individuals provided positive responses with regard to the advancement in technology which has made their lives much smoother and easier.

Based on the work environmental factors, 70% of the individuals experienced high levels of job stress due to the work demands that the managerial level employees face in the apparel sector. Furthermore, as part of the organizational support programs, all the individuals expressed that flexible work hour policy is highly lacking in the apparel sector.

Focusing on the home environmental factors, 70% expressed positive responses on the support which they receive from their spouses in attaining work-life balance. Hence, majority of them did not experience any issue with regard to family life and all them were stress free in terms of the family domain. Furthermore, 60% of the individuals stressed out that less time are devoted for childcare responsibilities due to the busy life which they face as the managerial level employees in the apparel industry.

**Propositions**

The proposition of the research study consists of the factors which influence the work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial sector of the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. They are as follows:
P1: Personal factors highly influence the work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial positions. P2: Work environmental factors play a key role in the attainment of work-life balance since the individuals spend majority of their time at the work place. P3: Home environmental factors have a significant influence on the achievement of work-life balance.

The propositions are grounded mainly on the findings and analysis of exploratory research study.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on the findings and the discussion of the study, the following recommendations can be made to enhance the work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial sector.

- It is apparent that the working mothers in managerial sector spend longer hours at work due to high work demands prevalent in the apparel sector. This has led to the working mothers spending less time with the family leading to children’s unhappiness. Hence fully compensated reduced working hours from six to eight hours per day should be introduced such that the individuals will have more time for social activities, particularly time for friends, family and for relaxation.

- Fixed working hours from eight to five make it harder for the working mothers to attend to the family matters as and when needed. Hence the flexible work hour policy should be introduced to the apparel sector such that they can decide on specific start and finish times. This will lead to increase in choice and control and ultimately would lead to work-life balance.

- Majority of the managerial employees’ experience stress due to tight targets and deadlines dominant in the apparel industry. It is therefore recommended for them to practice effective time management techniques such that it helps them to prioritize the work with much ease without being stressed out.

- Another main issue faced by the apparel sector managers is the difficulty of keeping the children, when the parents and the homecare workers are not at home. Hence day care facilities should be provided at work such that the working mothers can always come to work and keep an eye on the children at the same time. This will permit the working mothers to have a balanced personal and professional life.

- It was identified that the working mothers in the managerial sector hardly obtain any personal leave due to the hectic work demands in the apparel sector. The top management should ensure that their employees, especially the women, have the necessary benefits of the company so that they would feel comfortable at the work place and perform at their best.

In conclusion, the researcher was able to achieve the objective of the study after a critical analysis of the in-depth interviews which were conducted. The literature of the study was based on the ideas and concepts provided by different scholars and the researcher identified three main independent variables which influence the work-life balance of the working mothers. The analysis identified a significant influence on personal, work environmental, and home environmental factors and their dimensions on work-life balance of working mothers in the managerial sector of the apparel industry.

**References**


