

Career Aspirations and Opportunity for FWAs: Perceptions of Pakistani Women

Seema Arif¹
Aqsa Ejaz²
Neelam Yousaf³

Abstract

Want for a career in knowledge age is natural for any gender, so is for women of Pakistan. The long working hours and inflexible hard routines make it difficult for women to pursue both family and career at the same time. The paper validates an urgent need to revise work-time and work-space for the 21st century women with evolving meanings of career and life satisfaction for them. A qualitative inquiry was aimed to explore the career aspirations of Pakistani women and the opportunities they get for flexible work arrangements at their workplaces. Data was collected from 40 women working in a variety of professions through 3 focus groups, and 16 semi-structured interviews. Interpretive analysis was used to derive detailed description through data. The perceptions of Pakistani women are highly gendered about their roles at home and work. They suffer from time bind, unable to manage their professional needs and their desire to have a successful married and family life. Whether married or unmarried, they found professional work hours highly stressful which are not only draining their physical and emotional energy, but affecting their social life and relationships, as well. With a poor sense of quality of life, it is hard to say whether women experience career satisfaction or satisfice.

¹Seema Arif, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology;

²Aqsa Ejaz, Aix Marseille Université, France;

³Neelam Yousaf, Monash University, Australia.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Seema Arif, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Pakistan. E-mail: seema.arif@umt.edu.pk

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1. Introduction

The dynamics of the work-world are changing in the 21st century. Society is aging with fewer males educated in modern ways. Moreover, after the liberalization of society and workplace, loads of women are entering job markets after getting specialized higher education and training (Booth & Van Ours, 2010). Although they enter any job bearing similar characteristics as their male counterparts, their traveling on the career path is not similar; it lags behind in terms of pay, advancement and promotion opportunities (Burke, Koyuncu, & Wolpin, 2012).

Women are still underrepresented at ranks of senior management in countries all around the world, and Pakistan is no exception. Similarly, working part-time or on reduced schedules is considered more feminized, because the contemporary women in industrial societies still adhere to the traditionally established gender-roles.

As an activity, work is strongly bound by space and time and difficult to arrange and manage at personal and organizational levels. However, recent adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) and flexible work arrangements (FWAs) have enabled people to schedule their work activities in more conformable ways (Plantenga, 2003; Posseriede & Plantenga, 2011). Besides, the idea of an ‘ideal worker’ has been left far behind by Generation X and Millennium Generation (Twenge, 2010); they are not content with the classic work arrangements related to both time and space.

In the past, women had to sacrifice their marriage and child bearing prospects to pursue careers. However, sacrifices would not benefit them as they would remain on low positions receiving compromised benefits (Rapoport, Baily, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002; Shapiro, Ingols, O'Neill, & Blake-Beard, 2009). Now females, especially the knowledge workers want to enjoy equitable career success, but not at the cost of their personal and family lives.

Arthur and his colleagues assert that “career is the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experience over time”, which may be reflected upon as “the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes” at any point in one’s work-life (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom,

2005). This notion has challenged the static view of work arrangement opening a scope of inter-organizational mobility and extra-organizational career support. Careers have become boundary-less (Arthur et al., 2005; 1996), multi-focused and transitional, therefore, they are more self-managed (Gilbert, Sohi, & McEachern, 2008; Sturges & Guest, 2004). Workers are now selective in picking skills and competencies that will ensure easier mobility between successive employers (Hall, 2002).

Therefore, career satisfaction matters more than objective career success – the objective outcome of one's work experience over time. Career satisfaction is distinguished from career success for its subjective connotation, i.e. personal evaluation of one's own achievements, progress made on chosen career path with reference to personal goals and aspirations (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Barnett and Bradley (2007) have pointed out that the choice of boundary-less career is threatening traditional psychological contract between employees and employer. It is because in the domain of boundary-less career, it has become difficult for both employers and employees to offer and receive traditional incentives, such as structured career path, job security and stability.

Organizations may have to seek new ways of reinforcing their employees in the dynamic world of work where both the nature of work and worker have changed. Globally new forms and styles of working have been emerging. In Europe, especially in OECD countries, many organizations are designing and offering flexible work arrangements (FWAs) to come up to the demands of new generation of workers (Galinsky, Bond, & Sakai, 2008; Possenriede & Plantenga, 2011) or to project themselves as 'employer of 'choice' (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008, 2010; Rau & Hyland, 2002) by shifting the responsibility of 'choice' to the employees by granting them 'opportunities beyond any single employer' (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). It is yet to be determined how meaningful the 'boundary-lessness' is for women working in traditional societies like Pakistan, where gender always tends to set boundaries for them.

Kumra (2010) reported that the prevailing model of success in the organization, the need for high-level sponsorship and the need to network, have some impact upon shaping women's choices for work and career. Some organizations may become 'gender oppressive' by labeling

women as responsible for their 'choices'. Many offenses are masqueraded by the "traditional authority" the society avows to males (Siddiqui, 2014).

The question is can women escape the orthodox gender roles strictly assigned by society? Whether or not the gender at work can become functional or dysfunctional at any point in organizational life depending upon the attitude one adopts on the career path? Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012) state: resilience is a positive attitude for seeking promotions, whereas, resignation and acceptance reflect negative attitudes of women seeking growth in their career.

In literature, we find that the relationship between flexible work arrangements and career satisfaction is understudied. There are few instances, however, where organizational researchers establish that female employees if provided with alternative work arrangements and supportive organizational practices appeared to be more satisfied with jobs and careers and professed higher levels of psychological health (Burke, Koyuncu, & Fiksenbaum, 2006; Burke et al., 2012; Koyuncu, Burke, & Wolpin, 2012; Lee, Engler, & Wright, 2002).

FWAs are not a popular managerial choice either; such work arrangements are resisted by management, available only at entry-level positions with fewer career advancement prospects and economic security (Junor, 1998). Stavrou and Ierodiakonou (2013) claim that FWAs wanted by women in an organization could be different from what the managers deem suitable for their organizations. Abele and Wiese (2008) finds that as compared to men, women scored lower in career planning and career satisfaction; thus, substantially they are lower on objective career success (pay, position, promotion etc.). It becomes important to investigate whether the need for FWAs facilitates or hinders the women in opting for a boundary-less career in Pakistan.

Takahashi, Lourenço, Sander, and Da Silva Souza (2014) report that women suffer more from the triple impact (work, family, studies) when seeking professional development. In a similar vein, McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro, and Dabir-Alai (2012) point out that motherhood and career breaks taken to comply with the demands of motherhood often prove to be detrimental on women's career progress, especially if the break is more than two years. Women feel restricted and depressed in such situations.

In this respect, Eikhof (2012) argues that although increased information about knowledge work, ICTs and work-life balance (WLB) has helped in creating flexible work environments for women, but there are certain hidden gendered consequences for women career, which seriously impact their participation and involvement in work. Flexibility at work has increased in many ways, but its most desirable effects are still awaited, namely, women's increased participation, advancement in their profession and gender equality (Arif, 2011a; Arif, 2011b; Eikhof, 2012).

Women are always struggling to seek balance between twin goals - emotional and market - conferred upon them by traditional society of Pakistan (Arif, 2011b; Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Beutell, 2010; Rau & Hyland, 2002). "Free choices" to opt for a career are not without constraints for women (Broadbridge, 2010). Life of a work-centered woman becomes difficult in the traditional society (Arif, 2011a; Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Kumra, 2010). Eikhof (2012) remarked that work related issues at work place involve a lot of gender complexities; and all stakeholders and partners at work must be critically aware of such complexities; whether they are employees themselves, or managers and policy makers.

Booth and Van Ours (2010) advocate that women take work seriously and want to sustain their jobs and enjoy a long-term career. It is reported that women working for fewer hours or not working at all have lesser life satisfaction (Burke et al., 2012); contrarily, job satisfaction drops considerably with the increase in working hours (Booth & Van Ours, 2008, 2010). What is the ideal then? Is there any point of balance or the ideal situation for Pakistani working women, or are they just vacillating between the ideal images of job satisfaction and life satisfaction? Whether or not women are destined for career satisfaction or they will have to be content with a "satisfice"⁴ (Corby & Stanworth, 2009)?

2. Methodology

Research about flexible work schedules exclusively for female workers in Pakistani context is almost non-existent. The purpose of this study was

⁴'Satisfice' is a term used in organizational behavior, which means to decide on and pursue a course of action that will satisfy the minimum requirements necessary to achieve a particular goal. According to business dictionary people are geared to accept and aim at satisfactory results because the current position is familiar, hassle free and secure; whereas, aiming for the best may incur undesirable costs and risks.

to determine the factors impacting the inclination of Pakistani working women to adopt a flexible work schedule while working at managerial posts. The study probes the expressed needs of Pakistani women to know how gendered is their driver of career satisfaction? What is the role of family needs and social pressures in determining Pakistani working women's career path? Whether the "wanted career" is self-managed or governed in orthodox of ways? What are the key points that organizations must keep in mind in order to quote better HRM practices for recruiting and sustaining female talent in Pakistan?

2.1. Method

The study aims to obtain multiple perspectives about career aspirations of working women in Pakistan and the opportunities of flexible work arrangements influencing their career development. Since the study is a pioneer in nature, qualitative methodology was deemed most suitable for the exploration of the phenomenon 'flexi work arrangements' and notions related to 'career selection and development'.

Hallmarks of qualitative research, both primary and secondary data have been collected for this study. The secondary data in this case is acquired through extensive literature review of previous research done on the relevant topics in various disciplines. This secondary data also served the purpose of triangulation as qualitative research seeks to conform to the theory (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Merriam, 2002).

2.2. Sample

Data was collected from 40 women working in a variety of professions, including doctors, teachers, managers and engineers, etc. Their ages ranged between 25 and 45. A purposeful sampling technique and criterion-based selection were utilized in order to maximize the range of characteristics (e.g. gender, age, industry, profession) theoretically pertinent to the research aims (Maxwell, 1996).

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Two techniques were adopted to collect primary data: 1) focus groups and 2) semi-structured interviews. The nature of data was cross sectional, collected at one point of time; the interviews followed the focus groups. Kvale (1996) has suggested, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" both interviews and focus groups serve the purpose well.

Tharenou, Donohue, and Cooper (2007) have suggested that particular interests and true thoughts of a homogenous group can be explored through a focus group. This method was successfully employed to delve into true thoughts of Pakistani working women about their career aspirations and available flexible work arrangements. The flexible nature of focus group technique makes it desirable to explore complex ideas (Belzile & Öberg, 2012).

Three focus groups were conducted with 7-9 working women from various professions to understand their career aspirations (See Appendix A for details of the participants of Focus Groups). Lead questions for focus groups were derived from the literature review. Focus groups helped us to draw main themes of the research, which were confirmed with 15 in-depth interviews with women who were in their mid-career or have reached their career peak.

Interviews are considered to be the most effective and efficient way of obtaining sufficient information within a short time period (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews allow the researcher to use multi-sensory channels: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Cohen et al., 2007). Semi-structured interviews were further supported by observation and field notes made during focus groups and interviews. The interview protocol is attached in Appendix B & C, where B describes the demography of the participants and C the questions asked during interviews. The interviews were carried out as 'an inter-change of views' between the professionals over a cup of tea to provide an informal and relaxed air to interact. Since the interviews were semi-structured, some unpredictability was expected; therefore, interviews varied in content, depth, and length.

All interviews ranged from an hour to one hour and fifteen minutes approximately. Interviews' data provided access to knowledge about interviewees' understanding of their aspirations for career, their want for a stable career and possible implications of FWAs in the process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The participants were particularly asked about their work schedules and routines and their impact upon the work-life balance, quality of work and quality of life. All participants allowed us to record their interviews, and the recording was repeatedly used in transcribing the interviews, coding for content analysis and interpretive analysis.

3. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in two successive stages. An inductive approach to data analysis was applied at 1st level, whereby categories and themes were allowed to emerge from the data obtained from focus groups (Janesick, 1998). Human based coding (Creswell & Clark, 2011) was used here for the content analysis (Weber, 1990) of focus groups and interviews to 'make sense of the data' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The data was reduced into smaller chunks and manageable indicators (Weber, 1990); the codes were assigned to the words and/or phrases according to the individual responses of the participants and by clustering them into themes.

After 'bringing order and structure' (Brewer, 2000) to data with the content analysis, in-depth analysis of emergent themes was pursued. The affective coding was used for final interpretive analysis, followed through 4 step methodology suggested by Marshall and Rossman, (2010): 1) organizing the data; 2) generating categories, themes and patterns; 3) testing any emergent hypotheses, and 4) searching for alternative explanations. Interpretive analysis aimed at getting answers of the research questions keeping in view recurrent experiences, feelings and attitudes, so as to be able to codify, reduce and connect different categories into central themes. The transcribed content was sent to the participants via email for clarification, elaboration and to ensure accuracy. Thus, focus groups with Generation Y females helped to establish perceived needs about FWAs, whereas, interviews with Generation X, helped to elaborate how these needs are expressed and served.

3.1. Validity and Reliability

The content validity of the lead questions used in focus groups and interviews was assessed by review of experts for relevance to the domain[s] of interest (Silverman, 2011). The study aims to ensure validity of research by using triangulation technique (Cohen et al., 2007); data has been obtained from multiple sources about the same phenomenon.

Moreover, throughout the study the participant approach and objectivity of the researcher have been maintained to establish honesty, depth and richness of the target data (Winter, 2000). During the analysis, the constructivist view in terms of co-constructing knowledge and reality

was adopted. The diversity of sample further ensured that multiple perspectives about career aspirations and FWAs will be obtained by securing the widest possible range of interpretations and views (Briggs & Coleman, 2007).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) have defined reliability as dependability of the research. Clear and explicit procedures were chosen as recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2010), ensuring that the research design remains congruent with the research questions while data are collected across an appropriate range of times and settings. One way to ensure reliability is to keep reliable records of data obtained through different sources so that there is a secure 'fit' between the researcher's records and the events recorded (Cohen et al., 2000), the other is to use reliable instruments for data collection. Reliability was incorporated into research design especially by taking care of these points: (1) designing all instruments in context of themes similar to those presented in conceptual framework and keeping consistent with instances assigned to the same category on different occasions (Silverman, 2011); (2) ensuring that all the interviews were carried out under the similar conditions and setting.

Each of the researcher, served as critical partners to each other, while analyzing and interpreting the data so that researchers' bias could be avoided. Coding was used not for the description of the data but to form clusters of similar ideas (Seidel & Kelle, 1995); it involved "noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena, and analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures". The process continued unless we were able to reach "a fuzzy generalization" in this theory seeking activity. With the "thick descriptions" thus achieved the ideas related to FWA and career aspirations got interconnected for further use and wider application (Bassey, 1999).

3.2. Ethical Consideration

All interviews were scheduled assuring the availability and consent of the interviewees. While dealing closely with real people and their lives, an ethical statement was developed at the outset of this research, echoing Kvale (1996) recommendation of an ethical protocol and Bassey (1999) ethical guidelines. The ethic of minimal intrusion was maintained throughout the study (BPS, 2006). To keep anonymity of the participants

intact, pseudo acronyms were assigned to the original names of the participants of focus groups and interviews; three lettered acronyms are for the focus group participants and 4 lettered acronyms for the interviewees.

4. Findings

Three focus groups were conducted with young females in the early stage of their careers to determine their career aspirations, and the influence of work schedules on their career satisfaction. An open discussion was carried out with mixed group of managers, doctors, engineers, psychologists and educators. Four central themes emerged from the content: 1) Orientation towards work; 2) work, life and relationships; 3) need for flexibility at work, and 4) career management drive. These themes were further explored in fifteen semi-structured interviews. The content of transcribed interviews was analyzed through interpretive analysis. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The joint findings of focus groups and interviews are discussed below in four suggested themes.

4.1. Orientation towards Work

Work is now an essential part of educated women's' identity and the need to do meaningful work was strongly professed by young females during the focus group discussions. Work is no more a gendered activity for women and they want to express greater autonomy in exploring and selecting their chosen careers (FNA; FSN; FSG; FAR and FSJ). They want respect and recognition for their work by learning and improving and adapting themselves to their work routines and schedules (FMH; FHI; FRH and FAM).

Many participants agreed to the principle that defining boundaries for work is a personal affair, and how much one wants to work is strictly a personal choice. Work adds to one's meaningful identity, no matter if it is full time or part-time. PTNY commented,

“Mostly in affluent societies it is not just age but the life stage that determines how much you want to work . . . otherwise it depends upon how much one needs to earn”.

Personal orientation to work is important, but in a thickly populated country like Pakistan, personal values and attributions seldom get rewarded. Personal needs define how much one will really work; job is not just about more income or a better life style (ENSF; AMAE).

"Sometimes work is not a luxury - a time out from work responsibilities; it is your hard core economic need. Your family survival depends upon it" (MBTA).

One's choice about the profession and a particular designation also depend upon one's own orientation towards work as well as on one's personal focus, i.e., whether one values home more or career.

"Being a home maker is also a full time job; women are never spared out of work with the exception of few elite" (FMZ; FMF and MDTY); "It's more about time-management than anything else; I've seen many women taking their work and family more seriously as compared to the women who find it hard to manage "work" or "family" only". (PTRM)

All participants agreed that personal, social and managerial skills highly matter and they are not achieved in one day: *"One has to persevere and keep learning..."* (PEHA). However, MDMN remarked: *"In orthodox work environments, it is hard to achieve both and work-life balance which remains a dream"*. Doctors, however, value their profession. To support this, MDFA stated: *"My work is like "Ibadat" (worship) - god gifted quality to be kind with patients"*.

However, it was also acknowledged that service should remain lighter at heart; it should not become emotionally burdening. BAS stated: *"I feel partly happy when comparing myself with jobless peers, and partly unhappy when comparing myself with females working in education or public sector"*.

Work orientation is a part of the socialization process and all the significant others play an important role in shaping it. However, it can be inferred that all the stakeholders can play a critical role in shaping individual attitude towards work, but work values are personally defined.

4.2. Work, life and relationships

The theme has discussed research participants' reflections about the work environment and work culture of their respective organizations. Most of the female employees wanted safe, secure, ethical and respectable workplace and environment where they can work without any fear of male dominance or harassment of any kind. A friendly working atmosphere with cordial supervisors is an essential need; *"the gendered attitude of "boss" is precarious"* (FAR). Nearly all of the participants

complained about micro politics, power play and fierce competition at the workplace, which makes the whole professional experience unhealthy.

Complying with the needs of modern work environment female employees wanted hi-tech facilities, independent work station, preferably a private place where personal privacy is least disturbed. Engineers and permanent teachers have demanded a day care center at workplace. PTKZ expresses her needs as follows: *“I look for comfort and personal privacy, and where I get it, I prize it as reward”*.

Many of the female employees (belonging to the private sector) find their physical working environment ideal. They were happy with the infrastructure they have been provided at the workplace. Contrarily female employees working in the government sector complained of poor infrastructure and the lack of tangible facilities. The doctors employed in the government sector hospitals were the most frustrated group regarding the provision of physical facilities, such as “prayer area”, “private sitting area” and “clean toilets” etc.

“Night duties are an essential part of my job, but in the absence of basic facilities, my duty becomes a “nightmare” (FSG; MDTY).

They complained that special needs of woman for privacy are not adequately met. Such depriving conditions make it difficult for them to stay for longer hours at work and force many of them to quit in the earlier phase of their career.

“Our family wants us to work, but they are very protective for us in managing our travel, accommodation and diet” (FSK; FNT; FQL). “... many of us come from affluent homes and it becomes harder for us to tolerate unhygienic work-place and misery of patients (FSE; FSG), it is physically tough and emotionally burdening...” (MDFA; MDTY).

Work has become an essential identity of young educated women of Pakistan. Young females are enthusiastic and want to enjoy all the aspects of their work-life. They want it to be as happy and satisfying as their personal lives: *“I think work is life and my friends / peers*

who are not working at all are victims of depression and related psychological problems” (MDFa). Paid work, however, is not the luxury that every woman enjoys. PTRM is of the opinion that,

“In tight economic conditions job security is the main impetus for work”. “it’s not simply work-life ... it is work for life” (VTFA); or it is “work” or “life” (PEHA); sometimes, we are so engrossed in work that all other facets of life seem to be wiped off our consciousness” (MDMN).

Many participants expressed their desire to learn and grow through their jobs. They were of the view that professional discipline grooms one’s personality and enables one to deal with tough situations of life: *“One becomes wiser as one learns to deal effectively with different people in different situations” (AMAE). Moreover, it was commented “To have a successful career in life one needs peace in his/her personal relationships” (VTFA; MDFa; MDTA; MBSA).*

Participants seemed to be very much involved in their families, whether it was a family of origin or in-laws. They derive all support (emotional, moral, and/or economic) from their families. Work orientation has shaped the role models in family in many cases. Contradictory views were observed about the value of personal and professional relationships. Some thought that intimate relationships are the domain of family and cannot be found in workplaces, while others were of the view, family-like relationships can be entertained at the workplace, because of the amount of time spent with the colleagues rather than with family and friends. However, our participants agreed that satisfaction with relationships depends upon *“organizational culture and set of people you are destined to work with” (BAS; PTNY; PTKZ; MDMN).*

“Individual experiences of dealing with people may vary, “everybody is walking with a persona to fulfill selfish aims and interests” (ESF).

Sincere, true and trustable people and pure relations are hard to find in the workplaces “enamored with politics and professional jealousy” (AMAE; PTRM; MBHS; ENSN). Women with affluent socio-economic background were more enthusiastic about their career; they were more confident that they would achieve their desired WLB than women from less affluent families. Women from less affluent families perceived

themselves at a greater risk of losing autonomy. They were ready to quit hectic professional lives to enjoy a peaceful life of “homemakers”.

4.3. Flexibility at Work

Most of the women are familiar with only one option of FWA, and that is part time work; the young women were explained variety of FWAs and their legal functionality during focus groups. They became excited and motivated for flexi-time arrangements, such as “condensed week” and other types of self-managed schedules, but none of them was willing to work from home. Participants, however, doubted that the current job environment and job designs will permit flexible work arrangements. VTAI remarked, “*Flexible work arrangements are hardly available*”.

The female workers understand that if they have to work, they will have to compromise with the working hours. Some feel that their job security will be challenged, as law and company policies are not in place (FNA; FAA; FAF): “*Satisfying working hours are merely a “dream” and one should not run after false fantasies*” (PTKZ). Some talked about the hazards, such as: “*You will have the same work-load*”, but “*lesser pay*” and “*no credit on CV*”, i.e., “*reduced opportunity to move up the career ladder*” (PEHA; VTFA; VTAK).

Other harmful outcomes perceived by the participants were also quoted; few complained that if workers remain occupied in continuous work, which is more like mechanical labor, little interest and passion is left in job, decreasing creativity in engineers and early burnouts in doctors are few of the consequences (MDMN; ENSF; ENSN): “*Personal fitness is inversely proportional to number of hours of work*” (MDFA).

However, with reference to MDTY public sector has much more relaxed working hours than private sector. Similarly, females working part-time in the education sector feel more relaxed than any other profession (VTAK, PTKZ). “Time bind” appeared to be associated with marital status; PTKZ (unmarried) feels: “*I am autonomous in deciding about my work schedule and put to ease by my Head of Department*”. On the other hand, PTNY (married) feels restricted and constrained and said “*organization is stringent about work time and imposes presentism culture - thumb-in & thumb-out - on employees, which is highly frustrating for knowledge workers*”.

Part-time work opportunity is happily availed by married women. They seem somehow more satisfied with life and are hesitant to show their career aspirations. Most of them have sublimated their personal desires in want of better career for their husbands and/or their children.... *“It’s not me it’s them”* (FMZ; FMF). Some participants were mindful about the perks and benefits, which working full time assure; MBAS stated:

“Working as a permanent employee you can go an extra mile with your potential and caliber judged at its best . . . one may enjoy good relationships with the management and colleagues”.

However, majority of the participants agreed that working as a permanent employee is a blessing if you have no burdening responsibility at home; otherwise it may become a curse if you have somebody to take care of at home like an infant or sick and old parent (PTKZ; PTNY; MDMN). VTAI added: *“I think while working part-time one does not know the system because one is not in it”*. It was commonly perceived by many participants that working as a permanent employee grants authentic experience; improves belongingness, relatedness and affiliation to the organization and reduces alienation (MDTY; MDFA; ENSN; PTKZ; MBHK; PTNY).

“One is assured of one’s identity, which adds to personal self-esteem and sense of achievement because you are regarded as a responsible stakeholder” (VTAI).

4.4. Drive for Career Management

The inspiration or motivation for work and to pursue career emerged as the most significant theme during the focused group discussions with young professionals. Most of the young and unmarried participants' career aspirations were high, while the senior married ones seem a little inhibited. Some of them mumbled with regret that women are not free to make their career choices; they had to let go of either one important part of their life. They were more attuned to the cultural norms and family expectations rather than blindly pursuing personal ambition.

“Yes! We are free to make choices, but we are not supported to manage the outcomes of our choices (PTNY)”; it means that women should take threefold responsibility (work, children and family),

(MDFA; ENSN; MBHK); PTKZ added: "...my brother does not feel obliged to take physical care of our sick parents". PTNY remarked: "...because extended family is the responsibility of the female in the house.

Some participants were wary of the organizational hazards: it is very hard to manage your boss, especially if he is carrying some emotional overload from home (MDMN). AMAE added: "...and they have their male networks and standards of performance, which you can never approach... gender works!"

Women are seen as objects of pleasure and satisfaction; if they opt a role of competing rivals, they are given a hard time... *there is no mercy in law of jungle* (PTNY)... *and women should not hope for the same – mercy and compassion; it is offered only in sub-ordinate positions* (MBHK). Many had to settle for nurturing roles at homes.

Some of them enjoy great support from family. Working mothers were the popular role models of those who take their careers relatively seriously (AMAE; PTRM; MBHS; ENSN). VTAI stated: "*I think that culture is opening up, and stereotyped inhibitions are lifting . . . girls are now not simply inhibited by their gender*".

A critical observation made in the focus group discussions and interviews was about the right age of marriage and having a family. Marriage, although idolized as an ideal goal of all girls is being avoided in reality. It was perceived as a social obligation rather than personal choice. PTKZ commented:

"A woman being single can't move in society with confidence because society disrespects unmarried women, and does not take them seriously".

Highly career oriented girls tend to be more affiliated with family of origin; their attitude about marriage is that of naive complacency. They feel liberated and are assertive about their right to decide for their right age of marriage. During the focus group sessions, young girls did not hesitate to express their desire to delay marriage and have children. They were open about it and comfortably discussed the "negative consequences" of marriage upon career. They had many stories to tell about their sisters or cousins who had to quit jobs after marriage. Many emphasized the right choice of person in life for which they could happily

wait. However, many were ready to their quit jobs or take career breaks after Mr. Right enters their life. Their prescribed mean age for marriage was around 25. PTNY argued,

“A woman’s career in marriage and profession are equally important. Social support is required for the balance. Self-identity and social identity are inherently emotional . . . being unsuccessful in either is stressful”.

She further stated: *“Career breaks can be taken that is why flexible work arrangements are important. I see myself working part-time and doing PhD with a kid in next five years”.*

The young participants seem more motivated, especially after knowing the option of FWAs; *“We want to enjoy the freedom and self-autonomy and do not want to be the losers”* (MDNY; MDTY). They identified that personal qualification and/or parental/family support is not just enough: *“We need more personal coaching and counseling regarding developing career paths”* (ENSN).

Senior participants were found to be very self-conscious about their choices; they wanted to walk on their own pace in their careers. PEHA made a judicious remark: *“It’s better to opt for a slow career rather than no career”.* They emphasized that women should be keeping long term goals in mind regarding career as our traditional society tends to set limits to women’s aspirations. Last but not the least,

“.... Glass ceiling exists; it becomes harder to believe in meritocracy. The values of boss and tradition of the organization (both male dominated) decide who is going to get what (PEHA). “I wonder if merit is defined by ability and experience ... it is more of a political choice... isn’t it?” (PTRM).

Women do not decide how they should behave while traveling up on the career path. It is harder to deem what will work best? In this regard, PEHA remarked:

If a woman works three times better than his male counterpart, only then she’s tolerated at some senior position... you can’t afford to fight; all you need is to compromise... (MDTY): It is not with us only; even Hillary Clinton had to do that. The women who do not make such a smart choice had to meet the fate of Malala Yusuf Zai

or Benazir Bhutto...” (PTNY). “... *Character assassination becomes another handy tool against women*” (MBHK).

Women are aware of their life and career demands and are facing career blocks courageously. They are learning to socialize, improve their personal skills and concentrating on time management so that they can be more autonomous and feel much more liberated in future. None of them was happy about the idea of quitting work; many of them were highly motivated to pursue a personal career, but they had wished that their respective managements should provide them with proper guidance, counseling and career management services. Here, a conflict arises because in modern management “career” is more perceived to be self-managed rather than defined by organizational management.

5. Discussion

The research reports that there is an overall positive influence of flexible work arrangements on work and non-work attitudes. Therefore, it is much more important how this utility is organized and used in the organization rather than merely making it available at the workplace. It is important to know about the exact nature of job and personal work orientation of the employee to shape employees’ perceptions and attitudes about FWAs. Employees should never perceive FWA a “threat”, “punishment” or a special “gift” (Rogier & Padgett, 2004).

Keeping traditional cultural norms in view, for Pakistani women, satisfaction with family relationships is more important than satisfaction at work. These findings are in line with the findings categorizing females as primary care-givers (Broadbridge, 2010; Eikhof, 2012; Kumra, 2010). The organization will not be able to utilize female talent to the optimal level unless it provides a physical work environment catering to special female needs and a psychological environment that ensures Work-Life balance. Transparent policies and complying management activities geared towards WLB ensure better employee retention.

In traditional Pakistani culture, the home and family are still pulling factors and work and work load are the pushing factors playing with autonomy, self-efficacy and self-esteem of women who are engaged in part time or full time work (King, 2004; Russo & Waters, 2006).

Moreover, ambiguous policies about FWA give mixed messages raising confusions about recognition and reward of work. To reach

desired career outcomes one needs to appropriate social positioning, and for that purpose more time with people with whom to position oneself. Unable to position oneself rightly at work one may shift one's focus from work to home and family or vice versa, thus disturbing the balance.

These findings provide valuable information pertaining to the experiences and perceptions of working women which may provide guidance in formulating organizational policies for FWAs, such as flexi-time, condensed week, or work from home. However, findings suggest that implementing FWAs effectively poses dual challenges upon human resource professionals; 1) to improve general HR (human resource) management; and 2) to reduce gendered views of management. This is similar to the previous findings (Eikhof, 2012; Kumra, 2010; McIntosh et al., 2012).

WLB should be the norm not the exception in modern organizations. When workers are not satisfied with their work-life, the spillover effect on their life and relationships becomes adverse (Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Sirgy, Efraty, Siegel, & Lee, 2001). Women need more support in this regard than men; therefore, HRM set ups must seek healthy relationship between management and employees for growing trust and faith in each other (Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

6. Conclusions

Opportunities for a variety of jobs in multiple professions are open for women in Pakistan. They are supported by family and are getting accepted at the workplace, but the role expectations are still gendered. Whenever, there will be a pressing need in their circumstances, it will be them, who will sacrifice job and career, leaving few opportunities for them to pursue a serious career. Many married women prefer part-time work over full time, and they had to sacrifice their career aspirations. It appears that marriage and professional career cannot go hand in hand. Women will have to choose carefully between a "career in the profession" or "career in marriage".

“It is not simply work-life, but it is ‘work’ or ‘life’ for women” in many situations. All females have expressed one or the other problem related to work-life, personal life or career. It is ascertained that women suffer from time bind and their need for a flexible work arrangement is

collective and universal, although, the need itself varies with age, life stage, marital status and job status.

Professional women in this study have understood and celebrated their right to FWAs. The study concludes that FWA should be a norm rather than an exception. Part time work must be officially recognized. Jobs should be redesigned in a way that offer women greater flexibility regarding work-time and help them achieve career satisfaction, may be by adopting slow careers rather than no careers.

Work environments are produced by the attitude of people at work, and this attitude is shaped by the policies that govern the work environment. Unless, the policies are human friendly, ensuring gratification of both primary and higher needs of employees, the workplace will never be regarded as a happy one.

Multiple surveys may be planned to carry out this kind of research in future, including longitudinal studies, sector wise studies and studies conducted at various job positions with females belonging to different social segments of society.

7. Implications

Flexi work hours provide greater autonomy at work thus linking positively with self-esteem and positive attitudes towards work culminating at career satisfaction. Theoretically speaking, career satisfaction is directly proportional to job security; therefore, organizational management needs to create guaranteed career prospects to employees availing flexible work arrangements or whose nature of job does not allow full time contact with the organization (Mohr & Zoghi, 2008).

Since the utilization of Flexi hours is yet very open and diverse rather than systemized, people are not very well accustomed with the right use of FWAs. They do not know the limitations and boundaries of its effective use (Lirio, Lee, Williams, Haugen, & Kossek, 2008; Sturges, 2008). Thus, management and employees have confused views about it. Many of them have their own fears and doubts.

The process of availing FWAs and their possible implications must be well explained in organizational policy (Hayman, 2009). Organizations must take an initiative about awareness campaigns and training programs to acquaint both management and employees with effective

use of available FWA options. Such training programs must also be embedded with career coaching and counseling.

The views about managing jobs at workplaces are still orthodox and bureaucratic in Pakistan demanding strict work schedules, overwork and staying late is the norm in the private sector. WLB and QOL centered HRM should strictly observe work ethics, pressing no one to stay late or over work in routine without being compensated. Flexible work options provide more opportunities to pursue personal interests and creative assignments.

Learning does not happen in isolation; learning at a workplace is a joint pull of work demand and suitable personal effort to realize that demand. VTAI stated: "Qualification and work experience adds value, vision and flexibility in one's life, improves adaptability and makes life easier". Thus, HRD needs reinvention, so that it may provide employees the scope of personal grooming and branding. HRM in Pakistan must be flexible now as women want to learn, adapt, grow and be professional (Abele & Wiese, 2008).

Pakistan is an overpopulated country; longer work-hours provide fewer people a chance to work, increasing economic and social distance. If appropriate arrangements for flexi work hours are made, then more people could be employed, many getting a chance to work for a handsome living, thus, improving their physical and emotional being. Consequently, sense of social justice and equity may improve in Pakistani society. However, it is contingent upon the provision of unaltered compensation for work. The choice is critical, healthy and efficient workers for productivity or turn-over, absenteeism, and other medical/health expenses (McNall, Masuda, & Nicklin, 2009).

Increased load of responsibilities of work and of married life is prompting women to avoid marriage and children. Average mean age of marriage has increased. Divorce rate has increased which in turn is promoting feelings of instability and insecurity in young females of Pakistan. Loss of WLB and increased work stress has disillusioned women both from marriage and work.

Women suffer through gendered attitudes and do not get relaxation in any of their responsibilities; neither at work nor at home. They are not even recognized for the economic contribution they make in running

their household/families. Work has become compulsion. In the end, it is a “satisfice” which may fulfill female’s primary need, but does not allow them to enjoy a higher self-esteem or sense of self-worth (Corby & Stanworth, 2009) for a fully satisfied careered life.

8. Limitations

The data is cross sectional collected at one point of time. The content used for analysis was self-reported, subjected to common method bias (purposive and convenience). The authors have tried to minimize the bias by adopting critical partner role to each other. The data size is small as compared to a large population of working women in Pakistan.

However, the deep probe into related themes of work psychology, social mindset and organizational framework regarding FWA and career satisfaction will provide the opportunity to future researchers to design an elaborate quantitative research on the topic.

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