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Sumaira Rehman, Muhammad Azam Roomi

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Gender and work-life balance: a phenomenological study of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan

Gender and
work-life balance

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Sumaira Rehman

Management School, Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan, and

Muhammad Azam Roomi

*Centre for Women's Enterprise, Business School, University of Bedfordshire,
Luton, UK*

Abstract

Purpose – Increased participation of women in the labor force creates challenges for them to balance work and family obligations. The situation becomes more complicated in patriarchal societies such as Pakistan due to women's stereotypical domestic roles, religious prescriptions as well as cultural norms and values. This study aims to explore different influencing factors on women's work and family roles in the unique Pakistani socio-economic and cultural environment.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), this study explores different influencing factors on women's work and family roles in the unique Pakistani socio-economic and cultural environment. The methodology helped to analyse data about challenges faced by women entrepreneurs to achieve work-life balance as well as to have an insight about some of the techniques and effective strategies they use to balance work and family obligation.

Findings – The results show that among other motivational drivers to start their own businesses, achieving work-life balance is one of the most significant ones. Their own businesses give them flexibility, control and freedom to juggle with their family and social responsibilities. Lack of sufficient time, gender bias, social and cultural norms as well as family responsibilities are the most significant challenges women face to achieve balance in a patriarchal Islamic society. Strategic planning, organising and delegating are the most effective strategies women use to cope with competing roles of work and family.

Originality/value – This ground-breaking work in Pakistan on women entrepreneurs' work-life balance may also inspire other women who want to start their entrepreneurial career.

Keywords Gender, Women entrepreneurs, Social values, Cultural norms, Work-life balance, Islamic society, Pakistan

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Increased participation of women in the labour force is posing a number of challenges. Among other challenges, managing work and family responsibilities is one of the most significant challenges women face (Frone *et al.*, 1992; Guendouzi, 2006; Noor, 2004; Shelton, 2006; Welter, 2004). In an effort to increase work-life balance, women have started entering into self-employment to gain more flexibility and control over their work and personal lives (Baber and Monaghan, 1988; Machung, 1989; Ward, 2007).

Balancing work and family is often more difficult for women than for men because of the disproportionate burden of the family responsibilities (Bird, 2006). Women face uneven distribution of childcare and other domestic responsibilities which become major barriers in the advancement of their career (Cross and Linehan, 2006).



Managing work and family for women entrepreneurs becomes even more difficult in a patriarchal society such as Pakistan where women are expected to share the large responsibility of family care. There is also a notion that work family roles are largely shaped by stereotypical gender roles (Gutek *et al.*, 1991) due to the traditionally held belief of men as “bread-winners and women as “house makers”. Therefore, the social construction of gender makes motherhood less negotiable as compared to fatherhood (Gronlund, 2007).

The concept of work-life balance is no longer a western phenomenon anymore. Though the majority of research in this area is focused on western contexts, it is also spreading to the eastern culture due to globalisation which has greatly influence the organisational settings worldwide (Lewis *et al.*, 2007). A comprehensive review of the literature suggests that most of the research on work-life balance has been conducted in the western countries at management level (Lewis *et al.*, 2007; Lewis and Cooper, 2005; White *et al.*, 2003). There are not many studies addressing work-life balance issues of women entrepreneurs (Shelton, 2006) and much of the literature has included samples of both men and women (Gurvis and Patterson, 2005). Most of the work conducted is in relation to the resulting psychological outcomes of conflict/stress as a result of imbalance (Bruening and Dixon, 2007; Smith and Gardner, 2007; Zimmerman *et al.*, 2003), and very few studies examine the solutions and strategies that can mitigate work- family conflict (Shelton, 2006).

In Pakistan, few studies address the issue of work-life conflict in taking the perspectives of both men and women at management level (Nadeem and Abbas, 2009; Noor and Maad, 2008). However, no research has been found that addresses women entrepreneurs’ perception of work-life balance phenomenon especially exploring the challenges they face in achieving balance, and strategies they use to balance work and family obligations.

This research fills this gap in the literature by focussing on women entrepreneurs, increasing understanding of entrepreneurial behaviours related to balancing personal responsibilities and achieving professional objectives (DeMartino *et al.*, 2006; Shelton, 2006). The section on theoretical framework includes distinct sub-sections on national and international aspects of gender and work-life balance. The methodology section elucidates the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) which helped to analyse data about challenges faced by women entrepreneurs to achieve work-life balance as well as to have an insight about some of the techniques and effective strategies they use to balance work and family obligations. Main findings have been outlined in the results section, whereas discussion section presents the critique as well as discusses and grounds findings in the expanded literature review. The conclusion section outlines main findings, describes this research study’s contribution to the relevant body of knowledge and indicates further research intentions.

Theoretical framework

Women’s economic participation in Pakistani society

Significant progress has been made by women, in the last few decades. Social, economic, political, and technological changes have helped introduce a new social structure, which facilitated women’s gradual movement to the public arena from the confinement of their homes. The situation in Pakistan is not the same as in the Western and other developed/developing countries. No matter which class or region Islamic

women belong to, their situation relative to men is one of systemic subordination determined by specific patriarchal forces. Two factors especially influence women's occupational roles: the cultural norm of *pardah* (veil) and the notion of *izzat* (honour) (Roomi and Parrott, 2008, p. 2). *Pardah* has significance as an instrument of sexual segregation and seclusion based on spatial boundaries, where women's activities are confined mainly inside the home while men work outside, or where women's extramural activities are concealed behind the portable boundary of the veil (Papanek, 1982). *Izzat* is the notion that women are repositories of a family's honour, and that their chastity and good reputation, being highly valued, must be guarded (Shaheed, 1990). Women are not often permitted to move around freely in some families; from early childhood, they are not allowed to go out of their houses or to mix with males independently. Throughout life, they are protected and discouraged from doing things on their own (Roomi and Harrison, 2010). However, for others, who are willing to let their women go out and get educated and become active in economic arena, inadequacy of transportation facilities, both private and public, acts as an actual limitation on their physical movement (Roomi and Harrison, 2008).

Kamal (1997) argues that social disapproval of working women in Pakistani society also reflects the invisibility of women's share in the labour force. Furthermore, their involvement in the family and other household affairs is perceived to be a social duty rather than an economic contribution (Kamal, 1997). However, due to globalisation and societal advancement, the scenario has changed now. Women are increasingly playing an active role in Pakistan's economy Firdouse (2005) reports that it is quite recent that women are coming into the job market and struggling for income oriented jobs to become independent and in order to get the social status as males. A woman staying at home to take care of the family is no longer described as typical Pakistani society especially in developed urban areas of Pakistan where both husband and wife work to meet their family needs.

Labour force participation of women in Pakistan

Women hold approximately 50 per cent share of the total population in Pakistan, yet their economic participation remain very low (13.53 per cent in 2006-2007 and 14.01 per cent in 2007-2008) compared to men (49.14 per cent in 2006-2007 and 49.34 per cent in 2007-2008) (FBS, 2007-2008). Men occupy 70 per cent of the total labour force. However, statistics show that women's participation in the labour force has been increasing (from 11.4 per cent in 1994-1995 to 16.0 per cent in 2004-2005) at a slower pace (FBS, 2003-2004).

Women-owned businesses represent only 3 per cent of the total 3.2 million enterprises (FBS, 2005-2006). This low representation could be the result of manipulation in the data as the data on women entrepreneurs is very limited. According the World Bank report on "Country Gender Assessment", 60 per cent of the women in the labour force are not reported and are either unpaid or underpaid as compared to men (World Bank, 2005).

To encourage female participation in self-employment activities, the Government has taken a number of initiatives to promote women-owned businesses, mainly by developing managerial skills and by providing technical support and information. So far, the Government of Pakistan has established specialised institutions Such as SMEDA (Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority), FWBL (First Women

Bank Limited) and SME Bank which are helping women in getting fair access to finance. Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCCI) is also playing a pivotal role in encouraging women regarding foreign and domestic market prospects through training courses and exhibitions in collaboration with international business ventures. To increase the networking access to women entrepreneurs, Women Information Network WIN) has been established by SMEDA.

Work-life balance and women entrepreneurs

Within the mainstream research on women entrepreneurship, work-life issue has gained increasing attention of scholars in various industrialised societies especially USA, UK, Sweden and Canada (Ahl, 2006; Brush, 2006; Carter and Allen, 1997; Caputo and Dolinsky, 1998; DeMartino and Barbato, 2003). The gender perspective in this regard, indeed, plays a pivotal role in flourishing discussion on work-life balance. Work and family are two most important areas of life for both men and women. However, in many societies, family obligations are assumed to be the women's primary responsibility whereas men are considered the breadwinners (Brush, 1992). This implies that work and family presents different set of priorities and challenges for both men and women.

For those women who tend to earn by working along with family responsibilities, researchers suggest that entrepreneurship is a viable option that helps them gain flexibility and control between work and family. Brush *et al.* (2006) found that women are more likely to start their own business for achieving work-life balance compared to men. Women, more often than men, cite the desire for flexibility as a main motivation behind starting a business, suggests (Carter *et al.*, 2003; Buttner and Moore, 1997; Baughn *et al.*, 2006). Number of researchers asserts that majority of the women embarking into self-employment go for the reason to develop more flexible schedules that provide them opportunity to balance work and family demands (Boden, 1996; Lombard, 2001) and allows them to work from home to reduce the burden of finding childcare (Boden, 1996). DeMartino and Barbato (2003) found that males get motivated to become entrepreneurs to seek high financial gains; women prefer flexibility in career.

Children and marriage are also among the influential reasons for women entering into self-employment (Caputo and Dolinsky, 1998; Robinson and Sexton, 1994). Presence of children poses different set of challenges to both men and women. Williams (2004) found that for many women presence of children is associated with distraction and supervision issue, whereas for men, it represents a source of motivation. Childcare responsibilities still falls primarily on women. This may suggest that women possess multi skills that they exhibit in managing business and looking after family, while men compartmentalise their work and family life.

Women who choose to pursue entrepreneurship find themselves in a flexible position to excel in those career options that prove favourable for their married life style and children (Wilmerding, 2006), but this choice often leads to conflict. Fitting business with family obligation is often "a difficult position for most women especially those with children" (Wilmerding, 2006, p. 149). While striving to get succeed in fulfilling the work and family demands, women tend to work too hard and often make difficult choices, even at the cost of their health only to satisfy their customers and keep their families happy. Jacobs and Gerson (2004) suggest that psychological

consequences of combined tensions of work and family primarily fall on women that result in negative consequences, while Fels (2004) contends that work and family management provides ample opportunities for women to develop and grow their interests since participation in both spheres of life enriches their entrepreneurial skills.

In addition to family and personal challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, societal norms and beliefs further expose greater pressure on women in both developed and developing countries alike. People in society attach certain values and expectations based on the gender specific roles. These values and expectations often affect the career choices of women (Baughn *et al.*, 2006). Societal beliefs perceive women as primary caregivers. As a result, in an effort to live up to the societal expectations, women took abundant responsibilities on them to simultaneously exceed business while serving as the ideal domestic caregiver and a mother too. Therefore, women prefer entrepreneurship to gain greater flexibility to manage their obligations in contrast with the duty bound career in a traditional corporate job.

However, doing so, may hinder the success of women led entrepreneurial venture, as it does not become the first priority for women. Ahl (2007) raises the point that due to the unequal distribution of domestic work, women cannot equally compete with men on professional grounds where societal mindset reckons a woman's business as secondary to her husband's work and family. Ahl (2007) seems consistent with findings of Fels(2004) when he acclaims that women are defined by their roles and considered as provider or caregiver of others within their private life. This construction of women's role as primary caregiver (Ahl) reflects the real challenge in women entrepreneurial endeavours. Hence, it is important to trace the constraining factors when researching women entrepreneurs and identify the influence of these factors on a woman entrepreneur posing demands on her time and attention (Mirchandani, 1999).

Most of the literature cited above is dominantly from western perspective. Although little research has directed its attention towards work-life conflict in cultural settings of Pakistan, they only give the perspective of organisationally employed persons (see for example, (Nadeem and Abbas, 2009; Noor and Maad, 2008). The literature in relation to work family is somewhat non prevalent in context of Pakistani women entrepreneurs. However, no research has been found that addresses women entrepreneurs' perception of work-life balance phenomenon especially exploring the challenges they face in achieving balance, and strategies they use to balance work and family obligations. Therefore, the above reviewed studies nevertheless, provide a useful understanding to address the research questions. This research fills this gap in the literature by focussing on women entrepreneurs, increasing understanding of entrepreneurial behaviours related to balancing personal responsibilities and achieving professional objectives (DeMartino *et al.*, 2006; Shelton, 2006).

Research methodology

The design selected for this study is qualitative phenomenology, which helps the researcher to gain deeper understanding of participant's lived experiences (Goulding, 2005). No research has been found that addresses the work-life balance issues of Pakistani women entrepreneurs. The qualitative nature of inquiry is appropriate where little is known about the phenomenon or where "the topic needs to be explored" (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). A number of past studies have also utilised phenomenological

approach to study the phenomenon of work-life balance by exploring the lived experiences of women (Lewis, 2003; Millward, 2006; Woodward, 2007).

The purposive sample of 20 women entrepreneurs was selected who own and manage their business for at least three years and also have responsibilities towards family (especially married women). There is a huge gap in the literature identifying issues of work-life balance with respect to women entrepreneurs in Pakistani culture. The selected sample was a deliberate choice consisting of active women entrepreneurs with family responsibilities.

For this study, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted both in English and Urdu languages depending upon the convenience of the participants. Each participant was given the right to withdraw from the study at anytime. Interviews were tape recorded with the consent of participants. Each interview was then translated and transcribed. To ensure the trustworthiness, transcriptions of the interview were sent to participants for checking (member checking) that whether the transcriptions reflect their accounts as they described during interviews. Some participants made minor changes in the transcriptions, which further enhanced the validity of the interview data. Codes were used to identify each participant to keep her identity confidential. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Smith, 2004) was used to analyse the data. This approach is a detailed examination of each participant's response and how their personal experience addresses the questions being asked about the phenomenon of work-life balance.

The central open-ended research question that guided this research is how women's work and family roles are experienced in Pakistani culture – and what are the unique influences? The central question was addressed through the following sub questions:

- How women entrepreneurs define work-life balance?
- What are some of the techniques and success strategies used by women to achieve work-life balance?
- What are some of the challenges in achieving work-life balance?

Results

Presentation of demographic survey

Demographic profile of the respondents (Table I) shows that half of the women entrepreneurs (50 per cent) have been in business for over eight years and the rest (50 per cent) have been running their businesses between three to seven years. Most of the participants (70 per cent) are in the age range of 30-40 years, while 20 per cent are aged between 20-30 years and 10 per cent are aged between 40-50. Those women, who are more experienced in business, find it easier to manage between two roles compared to those who are less experienced. All participants are married and have children as dependants. The majority of the women entrepreneurs in the sample (60 per cent) have obligations towards elder dependants, as they live in a joint family system (close family network), whereas 40 per cent of the women reported that they had no elder dependants, as they live independently. The sample consists of women running diverse (both traditional and non traditional) businesses. As 40 per cent of the women are involved in boutique (garment industry) business, 10 per cent are involved in import and export of jewellery and carpets, 20 per cent are in the consultancy business, 20 per cent are running salons and 10 per cent of the women are in the pharmacy business.

Participants	Years in business	Age group	Marital status	Child dependant	Elder dependant	Nature of business
R1	8	30-40	M	YES	YES	Import export
R2	10	30-40	M	YES	YES	Boutique
R3	3	20-30	M	YES	NO	Saloon
R4	5	30-40	M	YES	YES	Consultancy
R5	5	20-30	M	YES	YES	Boutique
R6	7	30-40	M	YES	NO	Boutique
R7	12	30-40	M	YES	NO	Saloon
R8	8	30-40	M	YES	YES	Consultancy
R9	10	30-40	M	YES	NO	Boutique
R10	9	30-40	M	YES	YES	Pharmacy
R11	4	20-30	M	YES	YES	Boutique
R12	8	40-50	M	YES	NO	Boutique
R13	3	30-40	D	YES	NO	Jewellery
R14	10	30-40	M	YES	YES	Beauty parlour
R15	13	30-40	M	NO	YES	Consultancy
R16	5	30-40	M	YES	YES	Import export
R17	9	40-50	M	YES	YES	Pharmacy
R18	5	30-40	M	YES	YES	Consultancy
R19	4	20-30	M	YES	YES	Jewellery
R20	5	30-40	D	YES	NES	Beauty parlour

Note: M = Married; D = Divorced

Table I.
Demographic profile of
the sample

Findings

The responses generated from in depth interviews are grouped under different themes to discuss above mentioned research questions.

Conceptualising work-life balance

The interview data highlighted that each participant conceptualised and interpreted work-life balance as a desire to achieve overall quality of life (business and family). It further suggests that the term “work-life balance” has varied meanings for women depending upon their demographic factors such as family set up, nature of business and number of years in the business, marital status, as well as child and elder dependent care. Those women who are in business for longer periods of time feel more comfortable with both roles, based on their longer experience, they are more used to being efficient in coping with dual responsibilities.

Some women expressed institution of marriage as the core component of work family balance that poses unique set of challenges for many women, as one of the participants reported that, “after marriage, running business is even more difficult because I have to work harder to meet the high expectations of my in-laws.” The comment relates to the indigenous cultural norm of Pakistani social system where the primary responsibility of a daughter-in-law is to look after her husband’s family. Therefore, the construction of family norms and the set of domestic responsibilities make it even more challenging for married women to strike a balance between business and family roles.

The majority of women reported that family and spouse support is most significant in defining work-life balance family as one of the respondents shared her views, as follows:

I believe supportive and cooperative husband is the key to achieve balance. If he is with you then no family or society can stop you in achieving success on both ends (business and family) (R5).

The comment has brought the “essentialist view” on pivotal importance of husband’s cooperation for success of women entrepreneurs. The similar view was expressed by many other respondents as well, who recognised that owing to the support of the husband and family they found it quite easier to manage both roles effectively. The respondent (A5), based on her long entrepreneurial experience, further talked of the work-life balance factor extensively. She hinted to another aspect commenting that, “Balance is essential in life. If you don’t keep balance in your business, you will get upset. And if you fail to maintain balance in your family life, again you become very much upset. In both ways the business suffers and shows no progress.” As she attached “balance” necessarily with the success of both business and family relationships, it becomes evident that women entrepreneurs not only realise the benefits of balancing work and life but are also well aware of the negative consequences of an imbalance.

Most of the women also define work-life balance as “effectiveness” in managing both roles, one of them said:

You must be effective in all that you do. If you are not successful in balancing between business and family, you are better off doing a nine to five job rather than trying to run your own business (R18).

This reflects the proportion of time and energy spent on both domains of work and family. Some women also expressed that work and family roles should be kept together to achieve balance rather than keeping them separate from each other. Women also commented on the consequences of not having balance saying that:

Balance is must in life. If you don't keep balance in your business, again you will get upset. And if you don't keep balance in your family life you become very much upset. In both ways the business suffers and shows no progress (R1).

She attached "balance" to the success of both business and family relationships. It is also evident from the above excerpt that women entrepreneurs are not only aware of the benefits of balancing work and life but also of its negative consequences in case of imbalance. In essence most of the participants highlighted that time commitment to family is of the core importance. Wherein, a combined interplay of socio-cultural and family norms is the most important factor in defining work-life balance.

Motivational drivers

The sample of the interviewed women has reported number of reasons as the driving force behind their decision of starting own business. The most prominent of those reasons are grouped under various themes as discussed next.

(a) *Family needs and flexibility.* Among all drivers, achieving work-life (family needs) balance was one of the most significant factors that motivates them to start entrepreneurial career. They started their business out of necessity to meet their family needs. As one of the participants explained:

The reason was to have work-life balance because I got pregnant. I had my second baby after 8 years and I was sure that he would be more demanding and it will be not easy for me (R3).

The interview data thus highlights that a number of women went for the transition from being an employee to an employer to seek better time management to cope up with business and family demands. It is also evident from the previous research that most of the women use entrepreneurship as a "flexible career choice" to manage family duties (DeMartino and Barbato, 2003, p. 816). Another participant stated:

I had a "special" daughter I felt that working outside would not give me freedom of time. I could not spend much time with her. I could not arrange my hours in a job. So, with a shop I had that freedom I could have somebody to look after the shop I could go out with my daughter's doctor appointments or spend time with family. This shop gives me a lot actually. This gives me confidence; this gives me freedom with the money, freedom with time and meeting with people. Another thing is you learn a lot about life, about people, and about dealing with men (R6).

Participants feel that doing their own business not only gives them flexibility to manage business and family roles but on the other hand it gives them a sense of independence and boost their confidence in dealing with male dominated world. Some women have also reported that "need for money" is also one of the important motivating factors:

Of course, the need for money was my biggest motivation because unless there is a need nobody would be doing anything. When you are doing good and your business is growing then it's like an addiction. You would like to grow and feel proud of yourself and on top of all, you come out of financial difficulties as well (R2).

Some of the women entrepreneurs have also left the corporate ladder and entered into the entrepreneurial career for the necessity to have balance. They feel that running one's own business allows one to manage one's time effectively, which is quite difficult in full-time job:

It is my own time. I can juggle around my meetings and everything. I can set my appointments accordingly. I can do things according to what my family demands from me and what my business needs are . . . Sometimes, my son has parent teacher meeting and I have to go so I would take off for two or three hours. This is how I balance my life and this is the privilege you have in your own business (R20).

The interview data revealed that Pakistani women entrepreneurs tend to place priority towards family as compared to business. Gaining flexibility, independence and freedom of time are among the most influential motivational drivers.

(b) Spouse and family support. Spouse and family support also are the influential reasons that motivated women to start their own business. As some of the respondents reported that they had a lack of husband and family support in their entrepreneurial initiative, others took the support of their husbands as a great source of motivation. One of the participants mentioned the role of her husband, as follows:

My husband has been very supportive and open. He just let me do whatever I wanted to do. In fact he has been one of my key motivators and my advisor as well. Whenever I gave up or I felt a bit low and said oh no more! I cannot do this, or I cannot go again – all these kinds of things, I found him always being there to motivate me and to keep me going (R7).

The statement shows that the popular socio-cultural norms and trends of not valuing women choices are changing into the favourable and supportive behaviours to flourish entrepreneurial potential of women.

(c) Family background and attitudinal drivers. Women entrepreneurs also highlighted that their family background also played a very significant role in developing an entrepreneurial behaviour. Some of them reported that their parents owned their own businesses, so they have a business oriented culture at home. They got inspired from their parents from an early age, and developed attitudinal behaviour of “being her own boss”. According to one of the respondents:

The thing that motivates you most is that in job you are accountable to someone else. You have to learn to say “yes boss” but somehow, I had the habit to be a boss from my childhood. I got inspired of my father and my mother to do business because they were also doing their own businesses (R11).

Participants' profiles show that family background and upbringing does have an impact in developing entrepreneurial behaviours among women. Research on entrepreneurial behaviours suggests that business owned family, especially, a father running his own business, has strong influence in upbringing the entrepreneurial potential. The above interview excerpt reveals that sense of accomplishment is also one of the significant drivers. The desire of accomplishment motivates an individual to decide whether he or she wants to be the boss or follow the commands of others (Cunningham and Lischeron, 1991).

Challenges in achieving work-life balance

Reporting on the challenges, women entrepreneurs highlighted that lack of sufficient time, husband's non-nvovement in domestic chores, cultural, societal and family

norms, as well as gender biases are the key challenges they have to face in everyday life. Participants shared that they had to work hard to manage the overload of work and domestic responsibilities due to which their quality of personal life suffered. According to one of them:

I had to sacrifice my comfort, my sleep, and even everything of my personal life. I used to get up late in the morning. But after marriage, I get up early in the morning for prayer and do not sleep after prayers though I sleep at almost 2:00 a.m. I know that otherwise I would not be able to perform my family responsibilities (R7).

Women entrepreneurs highlighted that juggling with the competing demand of both (work and family) roles they have to work long hours, which greatly affects the quality of the life of women entrepreneurs.

They also pointed out that getting husband to share domestic responsibilities sometimes presents a great challenge because of the cultural, societal and family norms. Below are some of the excerpts from their interviews:

A Pakistani man usually doesn't like to be in the kitchen (R10).

It sounds or seems odd for guys to look after or take charge of any of the domestic responsibilities. As they don't have training for that by their moms, they have always been pampered as "son of the family" – as the breadwinners. So it was hard for me to get my husband on the track that we have some shared responsibilities as well. If not domestic chores then some external affairs like pick and drop of the kids or something like that. I have to see where he can share and support me without any hesitation and without any embarrassment in front of society and family (R4).

The above discourse suggests that Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men are not supposed to share the domestic responsibilities. This is also because from an early age, men and women are socialised in different ways. The difference in socialisation practices has led to construct gender imbalance uneven division of work and as a result family and society develop expectations about men and women that how men and women behave in the society (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Therefore, women find it difficult to have shared responsibilities towards work and family. Women entrepreneurs reported that the construction of family prestige and honour also present challenge to get approval of business, one of them said:

My father was not supportive though I was married at that time when I started my own business. He doesn't believe in women working outside their homes, in fact, his daughter working for earning money. He said: "people would make fun of me that you are a prominent businessman and your daughter is selling books" (R14).

It is evident that while living in the twenty-first century, women in Pakistani society are still open to societal, cultural and family challenges. A woman to women jealousy is one of the most significant challenges. As one woman said:

In our society, sportsman spirit is not there among women. The typical jealousy, rivalry and comparison are there. Men are not competing with each other the way women are. Leg pulling is there and most of them used to do backbiting. They don't have the ideology of "we have done", they say I did this, I am so and so. Therefore, "I" is the main issue (R15).

Negative attitude of women towards women is the most frequently reported challenge that women entrepreneurs have to face. They accepted that this non-professional

attitude cannot change the bargaining position of a women entrepreneur compared to male entrepreneurs. This has led to the creation of gender stereotype that “women are not serious business persons”.

On reporting gender related challenges, women entrepreneurs shared that gender bias is the norm in Pakistani society as described by one of the participants:

The main challenge is that the subordinates do not accept women as their boss (R20).

The above excerpts highlight that acceptance of a woman as business owner is the real challenge to compete in this male dominated society. That is one of the most prominent reasons why women are unable to grab the compatible opportunities as men do.

Women also reported that in some circumstances managing professional and business commitments becomes even harder where both roles interfere with each other, as one of the participants said:

The biggest challenge is commitments, any prior professional commitments. But if anything comes up suddenly like my child gets ill and you have to look after your family or something like that then still I am at the same point where I used to be when I was doing my job because I can't tell the client that my son is having flue and fever or he has a vaccination so I can't do the presentation tomorrow or we can't conduct the workshop next week and I will do it some other time. Once you have committed you have to deliver that (R12).

Though women place priorities to the family over business, they expressed that sometimes they have to sacrifice the time of the family if a situation of professional commitment hinders their personal commitment. This is where “Role Interference” occurs where one has to choose between the competing demands of both roles.

Among other challenges, some women have also reported that joint family system also poses challenge in their ways. They have to overdo (stretch themselves) sometimes to keep the in-laws happy. They expressed that if husband's family (in-laws) is not happy with your work they may not let you work properly so in this situation your work and family balance will go out of the window.

Techniques and strategies of managing “work-life balance”

Interview data has revealed number of techniques and strategies that woman entrepreneurs use to balance their work and family obligations. The effective techniques and strategies described by participants directed towards planning, organising, prioritising, and delegating. Most of the participants stressed on the importance of effective time management to keep a healthy balance between home and work domains. One of them expressed her views as follows:

You have to manage the time, as you have to give proper time to the home as well as to the business. If you are able to properly divide the time only then you can manage that (R6).

Delegating tasks is also a success strategy in achieving work-life balance. As participants described:

It's just a matter of how smartly you delegate your duties. You need to know how to delegate, what to delegate and when to delegate. I mean I cannot delegate someone to spend quality time with my son but I can delegate someone to bring grocery at home (R19).

Participants expressed the need to get outside help by hiring domestic helpers or nannies. Easy cooking and dine out was also reported as effective techniques. Getting

family members involved in participating with domestic chores was also noted as a success strategy. They have also reported that communication and relationship building with both workers and family can facilitate in achieving balance:

I didn't take rest any way. Right after reaching back I change my dress and get into the kitchen. First of all I used to make tea for my mother in law who liked the tea that I made for her, my sister in law and also for myself. Then I used to have a little gossip with them. Sometimes I accompanied my sister in law to the market and to bring something. Over there I used to shop for her and also my mother in law and they pleased for that. I must buy for them in order to keep them happy by presenting gifts (laughter) (R4).

Majority of the women highlighted that keeping husband happy is the ultimate strategy to cope up with family and business life and for that women have to be self driven. She reported that:

You have to be self-driven if you have to do business in a good manner then you have to keep your family happy especially you have to keep your husband happy because he has to support you ultimately (R8).

Participants also noted that adopting a strategic approach is the most significant technique to strike the work-life balance:

In my life I have prioritise things like, my father is important, my son is important, and my husband and myself is also important. I have totally compartmentalise my activities, my work timings, my quality time with my son, my husband, my father and other family members and friends (R12).

The participants highlighted that developing vision and commitment in prioritising are among the influential strategy women entrepreneurs use to fulfil family and business needs.

Discussion and conclusion

Women in the workforce continue to face the challenge of managing work and family responsibilities (Frone *et al.*, 1992; Guendouzi, 2006; Noor, 2004; Shelton, 2006; Welter, 2004). To gain more flexibility and control over their work and personal lives, many women have started their own businesses in an effort to increase work-life balance (Baber and Monaghan, 1988; Machung, 1989; Ward, 2007). Therefore, to understand how the role of work and family is experienced in a different culture such as Pakistan and to explore the unique influences, this research study was conducted. Built on qualitative phenomenological approach, the following themes emerged:

- conceptualising work-life balance;
- motivational drivers of women entrepreneurs;
- challenges in achieving work-life balance; and
- effective techniques and strategies to balance work and family.

The findings of the interview data reveal that work-life balance has different meanings for different people. However, childcare issues were significant as each participant acknowledged that time commitment to family was of the most important core values. Spousal support was also considered important, as those who had support from their husbands believed that they had a good balance with work and home or it was easier to

achieve balance. Among other motivational factors, achieving work-life balance is also one most significant motivational driver for women entrepreneurs. Both push (need for money) and pull factors of motivation are reported. Pull factors (such as independence, economic freedom, and need for achievement, etc.) are the most influential motivating factors for women entrepreneurs. Whereas the situation can be reverse in case of rural women entrepreneurs for whom the “push factors” such as financial needs maybe playing main role in the decision of entrepreneurial career.

The challenges faced by women entrepreneurs reported in this study include lack of sufficient time to be effectively divided between home and work obligations, husband’s non-involvement in domestic chores, cultural, societal and family norms and prevalent gender biases. Due to the increased responsibilities, business owners typically work longer hours and may experience more work-life balance issues than organisationally employed persons (DeMartino *et al.*, 2006). While one of the benefits of being a business owner includes flexibility, the pressures and time constraints may not provide the balance business owners are seeking. According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1996, p. 294), “women entrepreneurs devote significantly more time to family than men”.

This study also reveals a unique set of challenges arising out of the established societal and family norms that perceive women as the primary caregiver for the family (Ahl, 2007; Carter and Allen, 1997). The socio-cultural norms of women’s family roles are even more complex in Pakistani society compared to western societies where husband and family may not have significant influences on women’s career. As a result of deep-rooted discriminatory socio-cultural values, women do not enjoy the same status as men (Roomi and Parrott, 2008). Ahl (2007) also asserts that women cannot compete with men because of the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities, which may hinder their venture success because it is not their first priority.

The notion of “Izzat” (honor) places restrictions on women’s mobility for business needs (Shabbir DiGregorio, 1996). It is also noted that women have less network opportunities because of the societal mindset and gender bias: not letting them to intermix with male world, which ultimately have negative impact on venture success and opportunity recognition. Barwa (2003) also found that women in Vietnam are at disadvantage position because of the prevailing social and cultural-based inequalities and biases. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that individual choices are constrained by their socio cultural norms of family, work and gender (Moen and Yu, 2000).

The overall amalgamation of a woman’s family responsibilities and the requirements of her entrepreneurial venture make an excessive burden on her that becomes too hard to be managed simultaneously. The high expectations of themselves of “being ideal mother” while working also present a challenge for many women entrepreneurs. As a result, women tend to work hard which do affect their personal lives negatively. Literature also suggest that in an effort to keep a balance between work and family demands, they tend to work hard often at the cost of their health. Due to the increased responsibilities, business owners typically work longer hours and may experience more work-life balance issues than organisationally employed persons (DeMartino *et al.*, 2006).

To overcome the challenges implicit in socio-cultural norms, women reported number of strategies to effectively reconcile work and family demands. Other than time management, developing organisational skills, effective communication and relationship building, keeping husband and family happy is the ultimate strategy to

achieve balance. This is unique in the cultural settings of Pakistan, where life of women revolves around family traditions and beliefs. Morris *et al.* (2006, p. 241) noted that women entrepreneurs require a myriad of skills ranging from “planning and organising to the ability to delegate and make rapid decisions under stress”. Similarly Clark (2000) stated that effective communication and developing relationship with others are key success strategies. Our data also suggest that women entrepreneurs believe that effective communication and developing relationship with family and customers can help to achieve balance.

It is concluded that women entrepreneurs have two domains of work and family. Family roles are even more complex in case of Pakistani women entrepreneurs because of the societal expectations of women’s gender roles. To achieve entrepreneurial success in each domain requires leadership skills, including planning, organising, delegating and relationship building. When a woman decides to start her own business, she must recognise that each domain cannot stand on its own, and cannot be managed as separate entities. They have to be integrated into real life. The unexpected challenges that occur in regular process of life cause natural overlapping of roles and responsibilities. For example, a child gets sick or has a school requiring time away from business, will result in overlapping of personal and professional responsibilities. Some scholars have suggested the benefit of inclusion of “family embeddedness perspective” in entrepreneurship literature: suggesting that rather than treating work and family as separate domains, business and family are inextricably intertwined institutions with observable effects on one another (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Dupuis and deBruin, 2003). The findings of the interview data is also striking that women entrepreneurs perceived work-life balance as personal issue to be dealt with by using individual techniques and strategies because they view themselves as embedded into their family roles.

When a woman decides to start her own business she must recognise that each domain cannot stand on its own and these cannot be managed as separate entities. The unexpected challenges and crisis that occur in the regular process of life, causes a natural overlapping of roles and responsibilities. For example, a child gets sick or has a school performance requiring time away from the business, will result in overlapping of personal and professional responsibilities. Another scenario could be that an emergency after business hours, requiring the owner to return to the business, will interfere with time set aside for the family. The overlapping of roles cannot be controlled therefore they have to be integrated into real life. It is with each overlap that strength can be found and balance is achieved. This model suggests that when the two roles are expected to operate at the same time there has to be some interconnectedness that would allow the entrepreneur to draw from the strengths of both roles being connected. White *et al.* (2003, p. 358) suggested that employees should consider, “integration of your personal and professional lives as a process rather than a destination”. This concept is even more critical for women entrepreneurs whose roles are more complex than employees of a corporation. Therefore, by integrating together the two domains a woman entrepreneur may able to function with the strength of combining both entities.

Limitations and future directions

Our research attempts to address the gap suggested by (Shelton, 2006) that little research is available addressing work-life issues of women entrepreneurs. It will

further contribute to the body of literature on work-life issues of women entrepreneurs from an Islamic developing country's perspective. This study utilises a small sample of twenty women entrepreneurs from one geographical location (Lahore) of Pakistan. Conducting a study with larger sample from various geographic areas may allow generalising the findings to larger samples of women entrepreneurs. Validity of this study is limited to the interpretation of the responses and the ability to identify emerging themes. Interviews of women business owners could be interpreted as bias on the part of the researcher.

This study has only captured the experiences of women. Including men into the sample to compare the experiences of both men and women may give an interesting insight over gender issue in balancing work and family. Furthermore, this study focused on those women entrepreneurs who owned 100 per cent of their business. Studies exploring partnerships and family business may be helpful in understanding how work-life balance strategies are affected by sharing the responsibilities of the business.

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About the authors

Sumaira Rehman teaches entrepreneurship at the Superior University, Pakistan, while completing her PhD. Her research interests are in women's work-life balance, women's entrepreneurship and management, especially in Pakistan.

Muhammad Azam Roomi is a Principal Lecturer and the Director of Research at the University of Bedfordshire's Centre for Women's Enterprise. His research interests are in the growth and performance of SMEs and entrepreneurial ventures, entrepreneurship education, and women's entrepreneurship in the UK and Islamic societies in South Asia and the Middle East. Muhammad Azam Roomi is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: Muhammad.Roomi@beds.ac.uk

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