

EXPLORING MARITAL FACTORS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT IN WORKING WOMEN

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ms.masood.sbksw@outlook.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21508771>**Keywords**

Work-family conflict, working women, marital factors, qualitative research, thematic analysis, in-depth interviews, spousal support, gender roles.

Article History

Received: 28 April 2026

Accepted: 15 June 2026

Published: 30 June 2026

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Abstract

Work-family conflict is becoming more of a challenge for women in the work force, particularly in the balancing of the demands of their profession and the expectations of marriage. The present study qualitatively examines marital factors contributing to work-family conflict among working women. The study aims to explore the impact of marital relationships, spousal expectations, communication patterns, household responsibilities, emotional support, and family dynamics on the experiences of work-family conflict. The qualitative research design was employed, involving in-depth interviews to collect rich, detailed experiences of working women. The participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques for getting the relevance of their experience in marriage and employment. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. The findings highlighted various significant marital factors that contribute to work-family conflict. These consist of imbalanced distribution of domestic duties, absence of partner support, conventional gender role norms, marital conversation differences, childcare obligations and psychological strain due to conflicting priorities. The study highlights the importance of marital understanding and shared responsibility in enhancing women's capability to balance work and family life. The study contributes to a better understanding of the marital aspects of work-family conflict and provides implications for social work practice, policy development and future research.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in the labor force has significantly transformed traditional family roles and responsibilities across societies. While this shift has contributed to economic growth and women's empowerment, it has also introduced new challenges, particularly in balancing professional and domestic demands. One of the most widely studied outcomes of this dual role is work family conflict, defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which the pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Employed women, in particular, are more vulnerable to experiencing this conflict due to enduring societal expectations that position them as primary caregivers and household managers (Hochschild, 1989).

Marriage plays a central role in shaping women's experiences of work-family conflict. Marital dynamics such as spousal support, communication patterns, role expectations, and division of household labor can either alleviate or intensify the strain associated with managing multiple roles. Research indicates that a lack of spousal support and unequal distribution of domestic

responsibilities significantly increases the likelihood of work-family conflict among women (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992, Voydanoff, 2005). Conversely, supportive marital relationships characterized by shared responsibilities and emotional understanding can act as important buffers against stress and conflict (Carlson & Perrewé, 1999).

Furthermore, marital strain, including conflict, poor communication, and unmet expectations, has been found to exacerbate the challenges associated with balancing work and family roles. Women in strained marital relationships often report higher levels of psychological distress and role overload, which can negatively impact both job performance and family well-being (Allen et al., 2000). In many cultural contexts, including developing societies, traditional gender norms further reinforce women's disproportionate responsibility for domestic work, thereby intensifying work-family conflict (Shaffer, Joplin, & Hsu, 2011).

In the context of Pakistan, and particularly in Balochistan, these challenges are often more pronounced due to deeply rooted cultural norms and limited institutional support for working women. In Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, women's participation in the workforce is gradually increasing; however, traditional expectations regarding marriage, family honor, and gender roles remain strong. Working women in this region frequently encounter pressures to prioritize household responsibilities alongside their professional commitments, often with limited spousal or structural support. Additionally, factors such as extended family systems, conservative social expectations, and restricted access to childcare facilities may further complicate the balance between work and family life. These contextual realities make it essential to explore how marital relationships specifically shape work-family conflict among employed women in this setting.

Literature review

The challenges of balancing work responsibilities with family obligations can contribute to tension and discord within the marital context. When

individuals experience high levels of work-family conflict, it can lead to negative spillover effects, including increased stress and emotional exhaustion, which may be directed towards their spouse (Kinnunen & Mauno, 2000).

The limited time and energy available for both work and family domains can result in decreased quality time spent with a spouse, reduced communication, and an overall decline in relationship satisfaction (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). This can be exacerbated when traditional gender norms perpetuate unequal distribution of responsibilities, making women disproportionately affected by work family conflict, and potentially leading to resentment and dissatisfaction within the marital relationship.

Working for a living is considered a woman's option rather than a man's requirement, therefore when the wife complains about being burdened, the men excuse themselves from sharing the household load by advising that the woman should leave her job (Samih, 2009; Mirza & Jabeen, 2020).

Working women in Pakistan are faced with a lot more challenges in their marital relationships. These challenges often arise due to traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Many working women in Pakistan are expected to balance their professional responsibilities with household chores and childcare, leading to increased stress and strain on their marital relationships. Additionally, the lack of support from their spouses and families can further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for working women to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Child-rearing demands often intertwine with work commitments, and when familial support systems are lacking, the strain can be overwhelming. In traditional societies, where gender roles may be rigidly defined, women often bear the primary responsibility for childcare, even as they engage in professional pursuits. This imbalance can lead to heightened work-family conflict, as the demands of both domains collide (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

This lack of cooperation can strain marital relationships and intensify the challenges women

face in navigating work-family conflict. Working women experience role conflict when they find themselves pulled in various directions as they try to respond to the many statutes they hold (Pandit & Upadhaya, 2012).

It is not easy for married working women to work during pregnancy and after the birth of baby. Majority of working women prefer to quit jobs after pregnancy. Research indicates that inadequate support from husbands and in-laws can lead to negative spillover effects. The resulting emotional exhaustion and stress can have far reaching consequences on a woman's mental and emotional well-being (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012). Another severe issue is domestic violence. Domestic violence can be linked to work-family conflict, as individuals who experience conflict between their work and family responsibilities may become stressed and overwhelmed, which can increase the risk of violence at home (Chen, 2016). In a study by Zhang and colleagues, (2019) it was found that work-family conflict was positively associated with physical and psychological domestic violence.

According to a study, "work-family conflict positively predicts domestic violence". The study found that individuals who experienced higher levels of work-family conflict were more likely to engage in domestic violence (Zaidi et al., 2020). The reasons behind this relationship may include the stress and frustration that arises from balancing work and family responsibilities, as well as the societal norms and expectations around gender roles and power dynamics in Pakistan. This can lead to increased tension and conflict within the household, ultimately resulting in domestic violence.

The non-cooperative attitude of in-laws is also a common issue that can increase work family conflict and lead to domestic violence in Pakistan. In-laws' non-cooperative attitude significantly predicts work-family conflict. The non-cooperative attitude of in-laws can include behaviors such as interference in household decisions, unrealistic expectations around gender roles and responsibilities, and limited support for balancing work and family obligations. This can contribute to increased tension and conflict within the

household, leading to negative outcomes for individuals and families (Sajjad et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, in-laws' unsupportive behavior is a significant predictor of work-family conflict among women in rural areas of Baluchistan (Tariq et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

Despite extensive research on work-family conflict, much of the existing literature has relied on quantitative methods, focusing on measurable variables and generalizable patterns. While valuable, such approaches often fail to capture the depth and complexity of women's lived experiences within their marital relationships. There is a growing need for qualitative research that explores how employed women perceive and navigate marital dynamics in relation to their work and family responsibilities. A qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the meanings, interpretations, and contextual factors that shape these experiences.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore the marital determinants of work-family conflict among employed women using thematic analysis. By examining participants' narratives, this study seeks to identify key themes related to marital relationships that contribute to or mitigate work-family conflict. The findings are expected to enrich the existing body of knowledge by providing nuanced insights into the intersection of marriage and work-family dynamics, and by informing interventions and policies that support working women in achieving a more sustainable balance between their professional and personal lives.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that marital issues significantly contribute to work-family conflict among working women. The data indicate that conflicts within the marital relationship intensify emotional strain, reduce work efficiency, and create persistent role imbalance. The themes cover various topics such as work-life balance, conflicts related to gender roles, work-related stress, financial issues, and communication problems. The responses describe how these issues have

affected their marriages. Overall, the text provides insight into the common problems faced by working women in their personal lives.

Bad Relationship with husband

All respondents were in the opinion that it's important to remember that every marriage faces its

own unique set of challenges, and it's not always easy to navigate them. Communication and compromise is key to finding solutions and working through conflicts. Respondents said that they face many issues in their marital life due to their jobs and sometimes they hit them psychologically because of their intensity especially when they have bad times with husbands and in laws.

According to a respondent

"One of the biggest challenges I face as a working woman is balancing my career and my marriage. My husband doesn't always understand the demands of my job and the pressure I'm under. There are times when he feels neglected or resentful, and it can lead to arguments and tension in our relationship. It's hard to find time for each other, and it's even harder to communicate effectively when we're both stressed and exhausted." [INT Ngo employee]

One of the respondents said that,

"My husband and I have different expectations about gender roles and responsibilities, and it can cause a lot of conflict in our marriage. He expects me to take care for most of the household duties, even though I work full-time. This can be incredibly frustrating and exhausting, and it's hard to get him to understand the amount of work I have to do both at home and at work. We've had to work hard to find a balance that works for both of us, but it's still a source of tension." [INT Ngo employee]

Another one expressed that

"I feel like my marriage has suffered because of my job. I work long hours and often come home exhausted and stressed. It's hard to find the energy to connect with my husband, and we've grown apart in many ways. It's a constant struggle to maintain intimacy and communication, and I worry that we're drifting further apart it makes me very stressed and depressed." [INT Bank employee]

Talking about financial situation one respondent said that

"Money has been a big source of tension in our marriage. We have different spending habits and priorities, and it's been hard to find a balance that works for both of us. There have been times when we've struggled to make ends meet, and it's been stressful and frustrating. We've tried to be open and honest about our finances and make a budget that works for both of us, but it's still a work in progress." [INT University employee]

Additionally, differences in communication styles and misunderstandings can further exacerbate the tension in a marriage.

A respondent said that

"Communication has been a big challenge in our marriage. We have very different communication styles, and it's hard to understand each other sometimes. I tend to be more direct and to the point, while my partner is more passive and avoids conflict. This has led to misunderstandings and hurt feelings in the past. We've been working on being more patient and understanding with each other and learning to communicate in a way that works for both of us." [INT University Teacher]

No help from husband and in-laws in child rearing

Husbands and in-laws are not helping working women in rearing and caring of their children.

They have to work hard at jobs, and afterward, they work harder in child care. This can lead to burnout and exhaustion, ultimately affecting their productivity at work and overall wellbeing.

Respondent said

"Males may not even know how to do chores, much less take care of babies, because they were raised in stereotypical gender roles. This can place a heavy burden on one partner in a relationship, especially if they are expected to manage the majority of household duties, look after the kids, and work outside of the home. It's easy to let things fall apart and begin to get angry at your husband for not helping out with the baby. When you ask him to assist you around the house, he might even become irritated. And worse." [INT Ngo employee]

Another one expressed

"Men are not at all ready to help you with any of child care activities. It's only mother's responsibility to take care of children from every aspect either with their school home works, exams, teaching them manners, from eating to sleeping it's only the mother who is responsible for the rearing and caring of children." [INT University Teacher]

Another one said

"My husband and in laws never try to understand the responsibilities I have as a working mother. They never come forward or lend a helping hand with children's responsibilities. I have to manage everything all alone like a superwoman, which leaves me exhausted, frustrated, and angry. I often wonder why it is always me who compromises for my children; they are his children too; he must care for them and share their work with me. But it's not looking to happen anytime soon. I have tried talking to him about it, but he always brushes it off or makes excuses. It's starting to take a toll on our relationship, and I fear that if things don't change soon, it may lead to irreparable damage." [INT Bank Employee]

One participant shared

"Ahh (with a sigh), it's a most conflicting debate in your home when you even expect to share the work of your children with your family, including your husband and in-laws. My mother-in-law and sisters-in-law never think about helping me with the little chores of my children, like having someone help them with eating their food or doing their homework, or even just to engage them so I can do other household chores. They never come forward to help, despite the fact that I'm working at home alone. They never think about me on sympathetic grounds. This makes me feel tensed, stressed, and grumbled. I have tried talking to them about it, but it seems like they don't understand the amount of work I have to do. I wish they could be more considerate and help out around the house." [INT University Employee]

Non cooperative attitude of in-laws

The majority of respondent said that in-laws in Pakistan have a unfavorable policy for working women, which is a very sad reality. In addition to not assisting them, they make it more challenging for women to balance work and family tasks.

A respondent expressed

"In laws can play a very vital role in our lives. Mine are not cooperative at any level. They don't want to understand that I'm not a housewife or a robot that can do work all day. I am a working woman. I also manage my work at the office, so I have responsibilities there too. The only sentence I heard is that it's my own choice to do the job, so it's not their headache to manage work for me at home when I am outside; I have to work like a

machine to manage all the work the whole day at home and at the office, which makes me exhausted and makes me remain stressed, grumpy, and frustrated." [INT University Employee]

Another one expressed

"I live in a big joint family; I have sister-in-law's, brother-in-law's, and their wives also living with us, but when it comes to household work, no one is willing to help me considering that I am also working outside, the home too. Isn't it something to feel angry about? They are at home the whole day, especially my sister in-law, sitting in front of the TV, enjoying watching programs but not willing to help me out with my work. I am overburdened, and my mental health is in danger due to the extra load of work that I have to manage all by myself. It's frustrating to see them being so indifferent towards my struggles and not offering any support or assistance. I have tried talking to them about it, but it seems like they don't understand the gravity of the situation and how much their help would mean to me." [INT, Bank Employee]

One said that

"Rather helping me with in work my in laws put extra work load on me, the moment I step into the house, they start telling me which work I have to do today, what they are going to eat with tea, and what they will like to have for dinner. I barely change my clothes and run towards the kitchen. Sometimes I am so tired that I skip my meals and rush to bed to take rest, as I have to wake up early again for work. This makes me feel so angry and depressed that they are treating me like a machine or maid, not like a part of their home. I wish they would understand that I also need time to relax and take care of myself, just like they do." [INT, Ngo Employee]

One of the primary challenges women face is the pressure to meet high expectations in both domains. At work, they are expected to be productive, competitive, and committed, often in environments that may not fully accommodate their needs as caregivers. At home, societal norms frequently place the bulk of household duties and childcare responsibilities on women, regardless of their professional commitments. This imbalance can lead to stress, burnout, and feelings of inadequacy when they are unable to meet these competing demands perfectly.

Discussion

The present study set out to explore how marital dynamics shape the experience of work-family conflict among employed women. The findings highlight that work-family conflict is not solely a function of workplace demands, but is deeply embedded within the structure and quality of marital relationships. In particular, spousal support, division of household labor, communication patterns, and marital satisfaction emerged as central determinants influencing how women navigate competing responsibilities.

A key finding is the significant role of spousal support in mitigating work-family conflict. Women who reported low levels of support or adherence to traditional gender roles intensified conflict, reinforcing the notion that unequal domestic expectations remain a critical barrier to balance. This suggests that when husbands actively participate in childcare and household responsibilities, the burden on women is reduced, allowing them to better manage professional obligations. Conversely, a lack of support intensifies the conflict.

Communication within the marital relationship also played a vital role. Poor communication often led to misunderstandings, resentment, and increased stress, exacerbating work-family tensions. This indicates that beyond structural factors, relational dynamics significantly influence how conflict is experienced and managed.

Marital satisfaction emerged as both an outcome and a predictor of work-family conflict. Higher levels of conflict were associated with lower marital satisfaction, suggesting a reciprocal relationship. Persistent imbalance and stress may erode relationship quality over time. This cyclical relationship highlights the importance of addressing both work-related and marital factors simultaneously.

The study also points to broader socio-cultural influences. In many contexts, societal expectations continue to define women as primary caregivers, regardless of their employment status. These norms shape marital roles and limit the extent to which responsibilities are shared. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing work-family conflict must extend beyond the individual and

household level to address cultural attitudes and institutional policies.

This study reinforces the idea that marital factors are central to understanding work-family conflict among employed women. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that includes supportive partners, equitable household practices, progressive workplace policies, and shifts in societal norms.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between marital conflict and work family conflict for working women. Results indicated that several marital indicators influenced the reports of work-family conflict by the women in this study. Both positive and negative marital indicators were found to affect the extent of work family conflict experienced by women. Specifically, women who reported low levels of spouse support, an unequitable division of household responsibilities, less couple communication, and less marital satisfaction reported high levels work family conflict.

This study also examined socio-cultural causes of the issue and remedies for the imbalance in the distribution of household responsibilities of couples. Persistent socio-cultural beliefs about women's roles as caregivers in the home, limit women's access to household decision-making, even when both partners are equally paid and equally employed outside the home. Balancing household responsibilities between couples requires a shift that occurs at the individual level, at the level of the couple/marriage, and at the level of society as a whole. This shift must encompass new workplace policies as well as a broader shift in societal perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities.

Achieving sustainable work family balance for working women requires an integrated approach which is interactive. Sustainable work family balance for employed women requires positive partnerships within marriage, gender equitable sharing of domestic work, and appropriate involvement of other relevant institutions to reduce work family conflict and promote well-being of women and their families.

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