

# Exploring The Challenges In Work-Life Balance Of Women Educational Leaders And Its Influence On Their Performance

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by women leaders of educational institutes in maintaining work-life and the various strategies used by them to mitigate those challenges. A qualitative research approach was used and the data was collected by using a semi-structured interview technique 7 questions were posed to the school and college principals and section heads working on leadership positions. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The findings show that the challenges of work-life balance have a noteworthy impact on the performance and personal health of the women leaders which is dealt with differently by them by using various support systems emerging from professional and personal domains.*

**Keywords:** *Challenges, work-life balance, educational institutes and performance.*

## 1. Introduction

Joshua Osenga says, "Balance is a feeling derived from being whole and complete; it's a sense of harmony. It is essential to maintaining quality in life and work". Now, organizations, this present time, seek to hire those employees who can manage to maintain an equilibrium between their work and non-work responsibilities (Naithani, 2010). Therefore, work-life balance is an indicator of those practices and procedures that help provide support to employees to maintain a balance between their family and work life (Roebuck, Smith & Haddaoui, 2013) and it is the complete absence of undesirable levels of clash between work and non-work demands (Greenblatt, 2002). This term according to Braun & Peus, (2018) is also considered a canopy term comprised of the aspects of work, life, family, home, harmony, equilibrium, conflict, and integrations but in its midst as highlighted by Chang, McDonald, & Burton, (2010); Kalysh et al., (2016) are two distinct concepts of balance and conflict and the connection between the roles played at work and home (Carlson, Grzywacz, & Zivnuska, 2009; Gregory & Milner, 2009; Karkoulian, Srour, & Sinan, 2016) (Brue, 2019). Gurvis and Patterson, (2005) defined work-life balance in terms of equally weighed time an individual can experience towards his or her expectations of obligation to career, family, friends, community, and leisure pursuits. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly brings attention to having a positive working environment for all workers, a workplace free of inequality, and the well-being of employees and institutional health. This

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review is intended to explore the work-life balance challenges faced by women leaders in schools, how these challenges influence their performance and health both physical and mental, and what sources and strategies can provide support to maintain and progress in these roles as leaders and family makers.

In today's ever-changing world "Leadership is not a simple process; it requires multiple leadership abilities (Al-Jaradat, 2014)", the women are playing a significant role in leadership positions because as determined by Al-Hussein (2011) women leaders possess distinct leadership traits and skills to lead the educational institutions even though they face several difficulties but they manage to overcome those obstacles effectively (Al-Jaradat, 2014). It is also reported by Lowe (2011) that women in leadership positions in an organization add positive benefits by giving importance to positive networks, being positive relation builders and subconsciously bringing new employees into the organization (Kelly, 2018). Women can have a lot of good experiences in leadership roles despite these obstacles (Al Hourani, 2023; Birindelli et al., 2019; Nickerson & Goby, 2017; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Workplaces that are more inclusive and collaborative may benefit from the distinct perspectives and leadership philosophies that women frequently bring to the table (Al Hourani, 2023; Birindelli et al., 2019; Nickerson & Goby, 2017; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). According to Al Hourani, 2023; Birindelli et al., 2019; Nickerson & Goby, 2017; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021, women leaders, along with effective leadership, can bring more positive and productive outcomes to the organization by possessing more effective interactive skills and more compassion and this leads to having a conducive, supportive and respectful work environment. Eagly & Carli (2007) name a metaphor "the labyrinth" to portray an image from the history of ancient Greece, India, Nepal, native North and South America, and medieval Europe very well portrays the complex, complicated, rough road and tough journey of women along the way towards their professional endeavors.

As they take on the tasks of principals and other administrative positions, they face a set of numerous challenges and one of those is achieving a balance between professional and personal life (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Due to the increased involvement of women in the workforce (Naithani, 2010) and the growing number of career-pursuing couples (Naseem, Faiz & Asad 2020) to work to meet the ends of family and the burden of household chores and care of children is creating new challenges of balancing between professional and personal life (Naithani, 2010). There is a significant conflict between choosing a career and family working women and their concerns about keeping a work-life balance (Gender Medicine, 2012). Sen & Hooja, (2018) try to direct our attention towards some more trending aspects which in this present time are becoming reasons for creating dis-balance in work and non-work life. They point out the culture of organizations that they are adopting in this technological time of expecting the employees to be responding 24/7 to emails, online messages, and phone calls beyond working hours and also offering the employees overtime work hours and work on weekends. The damaging effects of dis-balance in work and family life are also highlighted by Sen and Hooja, 2018 by stating the results of emotional and behavioral aspects which lead to low performance and decreased productivity. It, ultimately, also leads to stress and physical health issues and hence, requires an immediate concern of matter for principals and women in key positions (Sorenson, 2007; Wolfram et al., 2013) because the challenge of attaining a balance can also lead to low performance and immediate effect on the overall environment of the workplace (Madigan and Kim, 2021; McLean and Connor, 2015). The other drastic negative impacts include absenteeism and turnover (Diliberti, Schwartz, and Grant, 2021; Sorenson, 2007; Steiner and Woo, 2021). Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, and Andrey (2008) added that work-life inequity caused rejection in family relationships and work responsibilities as well as the harmful rise of physical, mental, and emotional quality of life issues (Brue, 2019).

Furthermore, these barriers have an impact on women leaders' commitment to their institutions and this directly influences the output of the organization, employee motivation, turnover, and job satisfaction (Campbell, 2015). Although female employees as described by Fullan (2000) adore their professional status and have good feelings about their jobs at the same time experience conditions of unease, restlessness, pressure, and strain making them consult doctors to take remedies to overcome these mental and physical issues Crozier-Durham, (2007).

Brue, (2019) indicates that the connection between women's work-life balance and leadership roles is complex and needs an extensive examination to understand, identify, and manage the leadership role development hurdles (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Kalysh, Kulik, & Perera, 2016; Loeffen, 2016; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). There are different ways through which one achieves a balance between work and life activities because it depends on each individual when one feels satisfied both with personal and professional responsibilities (Sen & Hooja, 2018) and work-life balance varies from person to person as different people have different understanding and concept of the degree to which work-life balance is attainable (Crozier-Durham, 2007). It is vital to have employees with improved work-life balance who can become more effective and contribute their efforts more efficiently and meaningfully to bring success and growth to the organization (Naithani, 2010). Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2004 The employees can get support in this area of concern from their organizations as well if they have family-friendly policies and programs to facilitate the balance between work and family life demands (Levering and Moskowitz, 2003; Milliken et al., 1998; PerrySmith and Blum, 2000). It is also noted by Campbell (2015) that most employees try to maintain a work-life balance personally daily but at the same time factors like a load of work, lack of professional support, and layers of accountability are some of the barriers in their way to attain stability between their job and family roles. In the local context like Pakistan Naseem, Faiz & Asad (2020) say that men are now supporting working women by assisting them with house chores but due to social mindset conditions, women go through stress and anxiety with the guilt of not being able to give full time as mothers, daughters and a wife causing work-life imbalance. Ford, Heinen, and Langkamer (2007) investigated that the support provided by both domains those are the family and work can have favorable and adverse impacts on work-life balance Campbell (2015) and Sen & Hooja, 2018 suggested several ways these domains can influence each other both positively and negatively. Family life can be affected by work life and likewise, family life can affect work life. This happens when the organizational demands of longer as well as irregular working hours influence the family life and similarly, employees' commitments to house-keeping, taking care of children and old, and other family obligations have an adverse impact on work life. This imbalance leads to rising work pressure and exhaustion (Bird, 2006). This study aims to explore the challenges women come across in maintaining work-life equilibrium, the influence of these challenges on their performance, and the effect of it on the workplace and the other staff members, and review some strategies to handle this imbalanced state.

## 1.2 Research Questions

How do the challenges of achieving and maintaining work-life balance affect the demands of the job and personal responsibilities of women leaders?

How do the strategies and support systems influence and facilitate to attainment of a satisfactory balance between personal and professional balance by women leaders?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Work-Life Balance (WLB):

#### 2.1.1 Meaning and Definition of WLB

In the work-life balance concept the term “work” relates to those actions that can be achieved by intellectual and physical abilities (Bello & Tanko, 2020), and “Balance” means to gain equilibrium between the work and non-work domains (Clarke, Koch & Hill, 2004). WLB is defined by Sheikh, M. A., Ashiq, A., Mehar, M. R., Hasan, A., & Khalid, M. (2018) as the preservation of a proper balance between working hours, employees' psychological and emotional participation in their work and family duties, and their level of satisfaction from these roles. Siddiqui & Shakir (2018). This term can also be defined as Organizations typically use this term concerning the welfare of their employees (Gagnano, Simbula & Miglioretti, 2020).

### 2.1.2 Historical Background of WLB

The history of the work-life balance concept is old (Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs & Ryan, 2008) and it has been devised since 1986 it became popular in the 1990s with the publication of Juliet Schor (Sing, 2014) when it became according to Rincy & Panchanatham (2014) a wide concept that covers suitable perspectives, priorities between life and work (Bello & Tanko, 2020). Before the French Revolution as indicated by Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs & Ryan (2008) the work timings were based on a day-night shift and seasonal work demands which made the life of people segmented into labor, relaxation, and refreshment. They further informed that with the introduction of automatic machinery in the industries after the French Revolution there was a significant transformation in the concept of life and work because the high demands of productivity by organizations made them increase the laborers' working hours which ultimately led to the conflicted situation that gave rise to an argument in 1889 in which US workers went on strike to demand an eight-hour work with a clear slogan ‘eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what you will’ (Rosenzweig-Fogel and Therstrom 1985). Khateeb, (2021) pointed out that an important turning point in WLB's history was the Fair Deal was signed by President F.D. Roosevelt The 1938 Labor Standards Act. This deed brought in some far-reaching modifications in the work routines e.g. banning child labor and establishing a minimum hourly pay, rules for recording and determining overtime as well as a 44-hour maximum work week hours per week, subsequently lowered to 40 hours in 1940 (Sullivan, 2014) and stated that these kinds of campaigns also come into account at the start of the twentieth century when several labor unions protested against long working hours (Myers, 1924).

A pioneering research was conducted in the 1960s by Rappaport and Rappaport in which the existing fact was identified that when people were engaged in agricultural work there was a close connection between family and work (Rappaport and Bailyn, 1996), and usually the whole family tied together while working for survival from home or at the workplaces situated close by to their homes (Carlson et al. 2005). This research mentioned that in the 80s and 90s, the French Revolution transformed the work scenarios from farming to industrial work which created a division between family and work because these industries which were loaded with electrical machinery were established away from homes at distant places in cities and this became the reason of creating a divide between the work and personal life (Naithani, 2009).

Lockwood (2003) highlights the high productivity and enhanced self-esteem as positive outcomes of a work-life program tracing back to 1930 in W.K. Kellogg Company introduced the work shifts consisting of fewer hours that is six six-hour shifts instead of eight-hour shifts. Lewis et al. (2007) indicate research conducted in the 1960s on women becoming a significant participant in the workforce and the families consisting more of dual bread earners. Due to this reason according to Sen and Hooja (2018) Government officials and policymakers place a high value on work-life balance because they recognize that each individual is essential to the smooth operation of society. Numerous companies have acknowledged the problem and used creative solutions to assist staff in readjusting to the imbalance (Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh,

& Reilly, 1995). Work-life benefits and practices (WLBP), also known as flexible working hours, alternative work arrangements, leave policies and perks, and employee assistance programs, are many initiatives that have been implemented.

## **2.2 Theoretical Background**

Throughout the history of this field, numerous theories and concepts have been proposed to address and link to different aspects of work-life balance to explain this phenomenon. Among the theories that have been proposed two of them are given below.

### **2.2.1 Segmentation Theory**

Blood and Wolfe are the pioneers of this theory and they proposed this viewpoint in 1960. According to the perspective they presented there is an absence of an interaction between work life and personal life and both are considered separate entities (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014) the reason for this segmentation according to Naithani (2010) is due to the transformation of workforce from rural lifestyle to urban. Each domain has its distinct experiences which are not affected by the experiences of the other domains (Young & Kleiner, 1992). Whereas Lambert (1990) advocates the process of segmentation is natural and automatic where the individual creates a boundary between these two domains because it is necessary to maintain a stress-free life by avoiding the pressure of the work-life on personal life or vice versa (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014).

It is stated by Bello and Tanko (2020) according to Piotrkowski (1979), it is a strategy used by employees to strictly control their thoughts, actions, and sentiments about their jobs when they are at home and vice versa. This allows them to draw boundaries between their personal and professional lives which enables them to completely organize their lives.

### **2.2.2 Spillover Theory**

Spillover is a theory opposite to segmentation theory. It argues that work and personal life are integrated because the proficiencies of one domain influence the proficiencies of another domain (Kiran, & Batool, 2022). Bello and Tanko (2020) state that it is the degree to which work and family are related, whether vertically or horizontally (Sirgy et al., 2001) positively or negatively (Morris & Madsen, 2007) the negative family experiences are associated with negative work experiences and vice versa (Staines, 1980).

This connection is explained by Rincy and Panchanatham (2014) with an example of an employee who in the case faces a negative experience at the workplace will have a similar kind of negative effect on the personal life as well as positive experiences such as promotion or joyful feelings on the completion of a task at workplace are passed on to the family experience same as the positive family experiences influence the work practices. Bello & Tanko (2020) mention that the talents, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that are formed in the personality of a worker in her family life roles are transferred to the work role as well and vice versa (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985).

## **2.3. Critical Review**

Friedman, Christensen & DeGroot, (1998) presented in their research for the managers three employee-friendly principles to follow, without compromising the performance-based results of the organization, to guide their employees to manage their work and personal lives and they noticed more organizational commitment in their employees. Kossek, Barber & Winters (1999) emphasized that workplaces to be more focused on the practical use of flexible long-term plans. In organizations, the key to attaining success in the implementation of schedule flexibility is

the acceptance of it by the managers and making improvements in their current environments to be more supportive of using them and to avoid long-term harmful effects.

This study by Gordon & Whelan-Berry (2004) examines how working women in those households view the support functions that their spouses and partners provide. Future studies should gather information about the real support that spouses and partners provide, as opposed to just how much they think they are providing. Furthermore, research ought to examine the support functions that a working woman's spouse or partner provides, as seen from their point of view. An even more sensible next step would be to research the pair as a unit. The outcome of Crozier-Durham, (2007) study is the construction of an evidence-based taxonomy of strategies and professional development programs for school leaders to maintain the work-life balance but no examples were found in the literature. Future research is to be conducted on this gap coupled with some more concepts like creating strategies to deal with WLB and examination of employees' personal lives concerning how they manage conflicts between work and personal duties. The study conducted by Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs & Ryan (2008) offered a succinct overview of how work-life balance regulations affect some of the contemporary problems that organizations and society are confronting. The evidence supporting the idea that work-life balance should not only be viewed as an individual's problem is examined in this review. Rather, it advocates for more investigation into the organizational and social issues that are highlighted in their study for future research. The body of research showing that work-life balance policies can effectively address societal challenges like declining fertility rates is still in its infancy and is seen as a key subject for further investigation.

Kumarasamy, Pangil & Isa, 2015 demonstrate in their study the value of workload and technological advancements in the office, but it also shows that excessive workloads and unrestrained technology use can negatively impact workers' ability to balance their personal and professional lives. This means that to benefit their businesses and ensure that their people's work-life balance is not harmed, employers need to keep an eye on these two elements. Work-life balance may be improved by employees through emotional intelligence, job engagement, and organizational support, which suggests that employers need to take action to improve these three areas. Additionally, more research is required to determine the connection between work-life balance and spiritual intelligence. However, it has been suggested that, in light of current advances in both work and life, work-life balance has to be reconceived and new forms of working relationships and arrangements must be included in a modern understanding of work. It is imperative to actively explore the influence of cultural beliefs and their potential to affect the perceived worth of work-life balance. Scholarly research on work-life balance and policy formulation must adopt a more comprehensive and sophisticated perspective of modern living and work (Kelliher, Richardson & Boiarintseva, 2018).

On the other hand Brue (2018), in his research gave a more thorough analysis of how women use work-family conflict (WFC), work-family blurring, and social support systems in leadership positions. Results point to the diversity of women who integrate and segregate their work and non-work responsibilities and emphasize the significance of both internal and external support networks for women in leadership positions. Bahrami, Nosratabadi, Palouzian & Heged, (2023) present in their study the impact of mentoring on the work-life balance of women leaders. The results of this study do offer recommendations on how mentoring might help women achieve a work-life balance, including practical methods, limitations, contextual elements, and expected outcomes. The viewpoints of men and women who take part in mentoring programs and their experiences juggling work and personal obligations should be the subject of more investigation. It is also advised to research suitable organizational structures for the successful application of mentoring in various firms, taking into account the unique circumstances and features of the institutional modes as well as their human resources.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Design**

Qualitative research design is used to study the impact of work-life balance challenges on women leaders. It required to rely on the lived experiences of the women holding the key leadership positions in various educational institutions therefore, the phenomenology approach was used with interpretivism philosophy (Samo, Qazi & Buriro, 2018). Moreover, this approach helped to conduct the study by directly interacting with the participants who are always a continuous effort to balance their roles at the workplace and home (Naseem, Faiz & Asad, 2020). The study focused on collecting data from lived experience and involved a systematic approach of presenting the findings from a focused to general or bottom-up approach (Chandra and Hareendran, 2017).

#### **3.2 Data Collection Instrument**

For the collection of data semi-structured interview questions were carefully made with the approval of the instructor. Questions were formulated by keeping in mind the various aspects of the phenomenon being studied for the research purpose. The questions were revisited thoughtfully under the guidance of the instructor of the course.

#### **3.3 Procedure**

The interviews were purposely conducted in a face-to-face manner, except for two, so that the most benefit for the study can be taken from the participants' experiences by having close conversations with them, and also their expressions can be observed closely by the researcher (Samo, Qazi & Buriro, 2018) and to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). It also helped in building a strong and positive rapport with the participants which created a sense of trust and respect of the shared information between the researcher and the interviewee. It led to establishing a safe and comfortable environment for the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It was taken into account that the interview questions with elementary details were shared with them before the interview approximately 15 days and consent was taken from them to seek their willingness to be part of this study. Interviews were audio recorded with the approval of the participants and the confidentiality of their names, interview content, and the interview environment was taken into careful consideration (Arifin, 2018).

#### **3.4. Sampling Method**

A purposive sampling method was adopted to select the participants for this study. The list of 14 potential participants was created by selecting women leaders working in leading positions for more than at least one year in various educational institutions. These women leaders are working as section coordinators, deputy principals, and principals at school and college levels. Out of 14 participants, one interview was discarded due to the ambiguity of responses to a few questions whereas one participant dropped out because of her uncertain unavailability at the time of interview date. There was a total of 13 interviews were conducted for this study.

### **4. Findings**

The lived experiences of the participants were transcribed and coded with themes which are displayed in appendix 1. These themes and categories are used for interpretations and analysis. The interview questions posed to the participants gave them a chance to think and reflect on these challenges faced by them almost every day and its in-depth analysis highlights the various aspects of work-life balance (WLB). Although a variety of information was received from the

experiences of the respondents many of the aspects they shared had similarities. The detailed analysis is given below.

#### **4.1 Perception of Work-Life Balance by Women Leaders**

The women leaders believe that WLB is an important issue. The collected data indicate that they have a comprehensive understanding of this term and they tried to express this term by using the phrases like “Harmonious relationship”, “Equality”, “Right mix of time” and “No dominance”. While one of the participants expressed in this way:

“It's a state where she tried to accomplish her goal, which is set for the person and the personal as well as for the professional life to gain satisfaction in all the domains, in all aspects of life”.

They feel that they have multiple roles and responsibilities at home as well as a challenging position at the workplace as a leader and they want to fulfill the needs of both domains to a satisfying level. As one of the participants said:

“Now, see, because I wanted to be a good mother. I wanted actually, my goal was to produce good human beings for society. So, I tried to fulfill this. I wanted to fulfill their needs at home. And then I also wanted to be an impactful worker so, I tried to work here also to the maximum”.

One more aspect was observed while receiving in response to their understanding of the WLB concept that they must maintain clear boundaries between their role as a female member of the house and the role of the partner not only establishing the boundaries but also giving respect to their positions according to the set norms by our society. This is important to have a peaceful and manageable relationship within the family while enhancing the strong bonding between the couples. She shared her opinion with an experience she had.

“For example once I remember that my husband said to me don't think you're the principal in the house. He said that on a certain comment that I had made and I took my cue from there. I didn't get you know it unnerved me a little bit but I realized what he was trying to say was right that sometimes it does happen with us that when we're in charge in certain places we assume the same kind of role in the home as well. So I took that and from that day onward I tried very carefully to be very careful that I did not try to be the top boss in the house and give because we still follow the old family values where the man is considered the head of the house and I didn't want to overstep his space.”

#### **4.2 Challenges of Achieving Work-Life Balance as compared to male counterparts**

Most of the participants shared almost similar experiences of challenges they face while trying to achieve balance in their work and personal responsibilities as compared to males. They all mentioned that in our society women have more roles and multiple responsibilities, especially at home as compared to males. Moreover, our culture has its set expectations and norms regarding the responsibilities of women as a daughter, sisters, mothers, and wives. Along with the leadership role this social expectation creates excessive pressure on the part of the women and she has to juggle these two domains as one of the participants stated:

“The expectations for women to fulfill both professional and caregiving roles can create additional pressures but balancing leadership responsibility... responsibilities with social expectations of women's domestic roles often requires intricate juggling presenting a distinct challenge not always faced by male counterparts overcoming stereotypes and addressing them addressing these social norms is an ongoing challenge in achieving a balanced in professional life.”

However, a few also shared that there is a lack of support from the copartner's side which is due to egoistic issues and the same societal mindset that the domestic responsibilities of looking



after the children, their educational formalities, and house chores are solely to be done by the female partner only. One of the participants commented this way:

“the whole home is depending on the woman, on the lady of the house. So, that is like, you know, that part is heavier.”

Another participant said:

“Now, see compared to males what I feel is like males have less responsibility for the family.”

Two participants shared non-cooperation incidences from their spouses at some places. Both mentioned that male copartners have an egoistic nature due to insecurities they develop if there is a difference in educational and professional achievements between them. This leads to, in some cases, violence both mental and physical because of non-supportive behavior and non-appreciativeness. :

“Sometimes, you do not get support from your life partner. And sometimes, there is violence in our society...From the aspect of personal life, I feel that in males and husbands, there are insecurities. Females and women are more educated. They are growing professionally. There are promotions. They are moving forward.... as you said earlier, there is a male society, there is gender bias. So, here too, acceptance, females, their perspective, their point of view, despite being right, they do not get acceptance in society.”

“...., my husband is supportive, but not too much. Again, I'll say I will not hide anything because it's an interview. I wanted to tell you the truth. It's male-dominated, and males have one ego. They also have one ego. Sometimes he thinks that she's going too high. Sometimes there is a conflict also. Because sometimes they think that she's going very high and I'm very low. So there is also a problem there. So we females have to compromise everywhere, even at home, even in our jobs, and even in our families. So I think this is the most critical type of thing.”

One very commonly noted aspect in society which to a certain extent is accepted as well is that due to the abundance of responsibilities of women as compared to the males they are restricted to low contribution in career-related opportunities from their side. As men have fewer work responsibilities at home they can spend more time in relaxing and career-oriented activities. This is taken as one of the barriers to advancing and one of them brought attention to this particular aspect by giving the following example:

“My brother-in-law is also PhD and he does lots of research. I am also a Ph.D. I do less research. I do less conferences. Like, let's say I will go to an international conference which is in Pakistan. He will travel abroad. If I write one research paper in a year, he will write three.”

Another issue faced by two participants was brought forward that being a woman leader sometimes it is experienced by them that while dealing with some male parents they faced issues of harassment and disrespectfulness while males took advantage of being strong by showing their dominance and by lingering on a solved matter. As one of them shared:

“I was bit from inside I was a bit shivering also because of the way he was shouting and he was making noise as a parent so I was a bit afraid also.”

And the other reported:

“he was not ready to leave my office. Whatever the queries he had, I resolved everything, and I satisfied him. But I know that he was doing some, that he was not ready to leave my office and he was trying to linger on the things and all and all.”

Apart from the negative experiences they very confidently shared their skills of being able to deal with matters with patience. This gives them the strength to handle such cases bravely and wisely.

“but then I just scolded myself I said no I don't need to worry I am a principal I have to see everything but being a female affects it sometimes it gives you that touch somewhere you are female so we cannot be so strong but then I realized you know I have to be strong on the seat.”

“But then I just showed him that I'm busy and thank you, sir, if you can just leave my office. But then still that person's parent was sitting and not leaving and not going. Then I called one of the peons and then I told him to please tell him to go because Miss is gone for a meeting.”

At the same time, the responses of these women leaders show a sense of satisfaction they have for being in leading positions in various educational institutions. This is because of the “inner happiness and motivation” they have as one of them said that she takes this position as a “vocation” whereas another mentioned that she feels to be “an impactful worker” for giving her maximum to the institution she serves while another showed a confident attitude for bringing “monetary benefits” to the family and few feel satisfied for being recognized of their talents and capabilities.

### **4.3 Impact of job demands on work-life balance**

#### **4.3.1 Negative impact**

The conversations of the participants produced evidence of their roles being compact and complex with the accumulation of their responsibilities at the personal level and the complexities at their workplace. This situation causes them to be ignorant about their health and a hectic job schedule with a competitive environment ultimately becomes the reason for gaining mantle and physical stress. According to them, their job demands them to be alert and active 24/7 for their day-to-day responsibilities as well as for any sort of emergency work from the office. One of them said:

“What my job demands is 24/7 I have to be alert this is the one thing I know even though we have our timing of the school I don't think that we are restricted to that time. I think 24 7 we are on our job only.”

One of the participants shared regretful feelings about a few of the experiences she had in the early years of her career when due to her ambitious attitude towards her career she neglected the health of her child and later she also couldn't give enough time to her daughter. She shared it in the following manner:

“So there have been times I am very sorry to say that my child has been in pain and I had still opted to go to my job.”

She thinks that women should not compromise on the health of their children as well as in giving them proper time. She further elaborated that women leaders should not think that their absence on a certain day will be much more affecting the workplace than the absence from home in such situations. To advocate her point of view she said:

“I just thought sometimes we people think that we are indispensable, nobody can take our place and we are nowhere trying to be very efficient with our responsibilities and all so I had made those great mistakes at certain times in life and compromised on the wellbeing of my own family but tried not to compromise on the job.”

Sometimes due to the huge responsibility of the leading position in the institution, personal responsibilities get affected as one of them said:

“Like, I have observed that many at times like, you know, the work is so much that then your personal... Some personal gathering or some personal meet up or there is some... Even if you have to go... You have to spend time on yourself that also then you skip.”

Due to double roles not only the family affairs affected but own personal well-being and health get into a critical state as one put it this way “We have to forget ourselves also” and another said:

“It has taken a toll on my health also at times. And my health has suffered certain times in ways than more than I could.”

One of the respondents shared an experience that showed a socio-cultural fixed mindset about the position of a male and female in our homes and society. Men are always seen as the head of the family and women while working in leading positions should not forget this aspect of our society. According to the respondent to maintain peace and comfort in a family one should not forget this reality and should accept this fact of our society. A woman has to be careful about her role in the house and should not step into the male’s position in the house. She said:

“Once I remember that my husband said to me don't think you're the principal in the house. He said that on a certain comment that I had made and I took my cue from there. I didn't get you know it unnerved me a little bit but I realized what he was trying to say was right that sometimes it does happen with us that when we're in charge in certain places we assume the same kind of role in the home as well. So I took that and from that day onward I tried very carefully to be very careful that I did not try to be the top boss in the house and give because we still follow the old family values where the man is considered the head of the house and I didn't want to overstep his space.”

#### 4.3.2 Positive impact

Other than the unsatisfying impact it has been noticed during the interviews that women leaders are still very positive about their contributions by bringing, as leaders, the laurels to the institutions and monetary benefits to the family. They believe although they face challenges in balancing work and family life they are confidently managing both the roles and feel happy. They are content and satisfied with utilizing their talents for the well-being of society as a whole. Some of the participants also highlighted that being in a leadership position is a challenge in itself whereas it also holds a sense of recognition of their talents and abilities which makes them feel like important members of the society. One of the participants said:

“And, you know, the dedication and the spirit that sometimes you feel that is no more in us that, you know, it arouses when such responsibility is given to you. You feel that, yes, you are capable and someone knows about your capabilities.”

The respondents also mentioned that they can achieve balance between these two domains in two specific ways. First, by planning and managing the work which is known ahead of time as one of them said:

“I balance my work and professional life in a way that should not harm my professional or personal. So, I try to do things like, normally, I know ahead of time”

Second, by the effective coping mechanism of prioritizing the work which requires immediate response in case any work comes up unexpectedly. An example of this type of strategy is the following statement by a participant:

“But even if suddenly comes, you know... So, I...Realizing the priority of professional or personal, I do the needful and then I do the second one. So, like, the impact was never negative. The impact is always that things are done and they are done nicely.”

The other few factors mentioned by the participants include “a supportive work environment”, “God gifted special strengths to women”, “a supportive family”, “more patience and emotionally strong”, “self-focused” and “setting boundaries” between the two domains.

#### **4.4 Support systems for Work-life balance**

##### **4.4.1 Formal support**

All the respondents pointed out several almost similar institutional or formal support systems. These include understanding management or boss, flexible working hours, supportive work culture, helpful colleagues, cooperative subordinates, wellness programs, and good organizational skills. These support systems appeared to be providing the women leaders necessary assistance, encouragement, and advice they need to attain equilibrium in both work and personal responsibilities.

Almost everyone spoke about the supportive head of the institution as a very important support system for women leaders. One of them while mentioning the prioritization of the family needs at a certain time said:

“So, even my administrator, he understands. So, if I tell him that on a particular day, my family is the priority, I have to do certain things for them, so he understands.”

Another participant very strongly mentioned the importance of having an understanding boss for women pursuing careers as leaders in their early years of struggle or even for those who are holding leadership positions. If women leaders are supported by their heads they may feel comfortable and it will be a bit less hectic in finding solutions to work-life-related challenges.

“And the formal one I would say for me for the first 18 years of my life where I worked I worked for a very very understanding boss ok... and that I think was a very strong support system in and that was Ms. Amy Gonsolves to which I am inductive in life a very supporting formal you know a head over there who understood the challenges of a person with a family would have to faced and put up with those and made the road path easier. I realized maybe it was a boss who would have not understood my path would have been very rough but the thing was the strong support system, somebody who understood my problem, had empathy for it.”

Along with having an understanding boss, one participant mentioned that the organizing of programs such as yoga sessions, mentorship, and stress management workshops provides the women leaders a time in which they can relax and meditate. Such well-being programs also give the women leader employees a sense of belonging and show them that their presence and role are significant for the institution which is why their health needs both physical and emotional are taken care of.

“With the concern and support of the principal, workshops, yoga sessions, and many more wellness programs are held for stress management and to maintain a healthy work-life balance.”

Another highlighted that sometimes due to some specific circumstances, there may be a need to have flexible working hours and this would be possible only if the administrator or the head understands the problems faced by another person in a leadership position. One participant shared her experience when she was at the last stage of completing her Ph.D. thesis. She said:

“Like my administrator at the job would support me maybe by giving one hour early or for two hours early off.”

Formal support also includes cooperative followers or subordinates at the workplace. This can be achieved by building strong connections with the staff members. As mentioned by one of the participants:

“So my recommendations are these to have a good relationship between me and my teachers so that our work is not prolonged, not taken home.”

#### 4.4.2 Informal support

The informal support system includes spousal and family support, benefits of joint family, socializing policies, Leisure time with friends, networking with other women leaders, spiritual guidance, inspirational role models, reward and encouragement, personal strong will, and determination.

One of the very strongest informal support systems according to the participants is an understanding and supportive co-partner. Women leaders can excel in their careers and perform their duties to the maximum if they receive proper support from their husbands and have a strong connection with them in terms of understanding the worth of the women’s contribution towards the family and society from a broader perspective.

“And the full support of my husband because he seconded and he said yes you need to do something. While he took care of the kids and all.”

Some described the help that a woman receives from her whole family while pursuing any specific goal at a particular stage of her life. According to this if a woman is trying to complete her higher studies for the sake of upgrading herself for career-building purposes.

“But my family was also understanding. In a way, they knew that they were, without their support, I would not complete. So, you know, all the cooking was done by my husband. Cleaning was done by my daughter. My son would not disturb me. He helped me with all that all the technical, computer typing. So, that helped me otherwise, like, it's not.”

One of the participants shared her experience of the benefits of the joint family. According to her if one has helpful in-laws then they can be very supportive in many ways in fulfilling the personal responsibilities of the house. She said while sharing her experience:

“I would say one, not the formal one but an informal one was my in-laws I salute them that they were people who supported me immensely, and once my mother-in-law was in good health and my father-in-law was. I never had to worry about the house I lived in. the food to be cooked or anything so I could you know just be concerned about my kids.”

Few participants feel that some socializing policies like networking with same-positioned women from different institutions who have potential achievements in the field of leadership can share their experiences and support each other’s contribution which provides moral support to them.

“You know just a bit for over a cup of tea something.. is that kind of thing if not or not bigger scale but at least this, you like to share. To share the experiences and all so that can learn from each other or you can, you know get support from each other from your colleagues you can say colleagues in a way being on that same position leadership position.”

Respondents reported that they get inspiration from the lives of different people around them. These personalities can be from the family or their workplaces. The achievements of these inspiring figures and their journeys not only motivate them to reach higher positions but also try to find solutions to challenges related to maintaining a balance in their professional and personal roles.

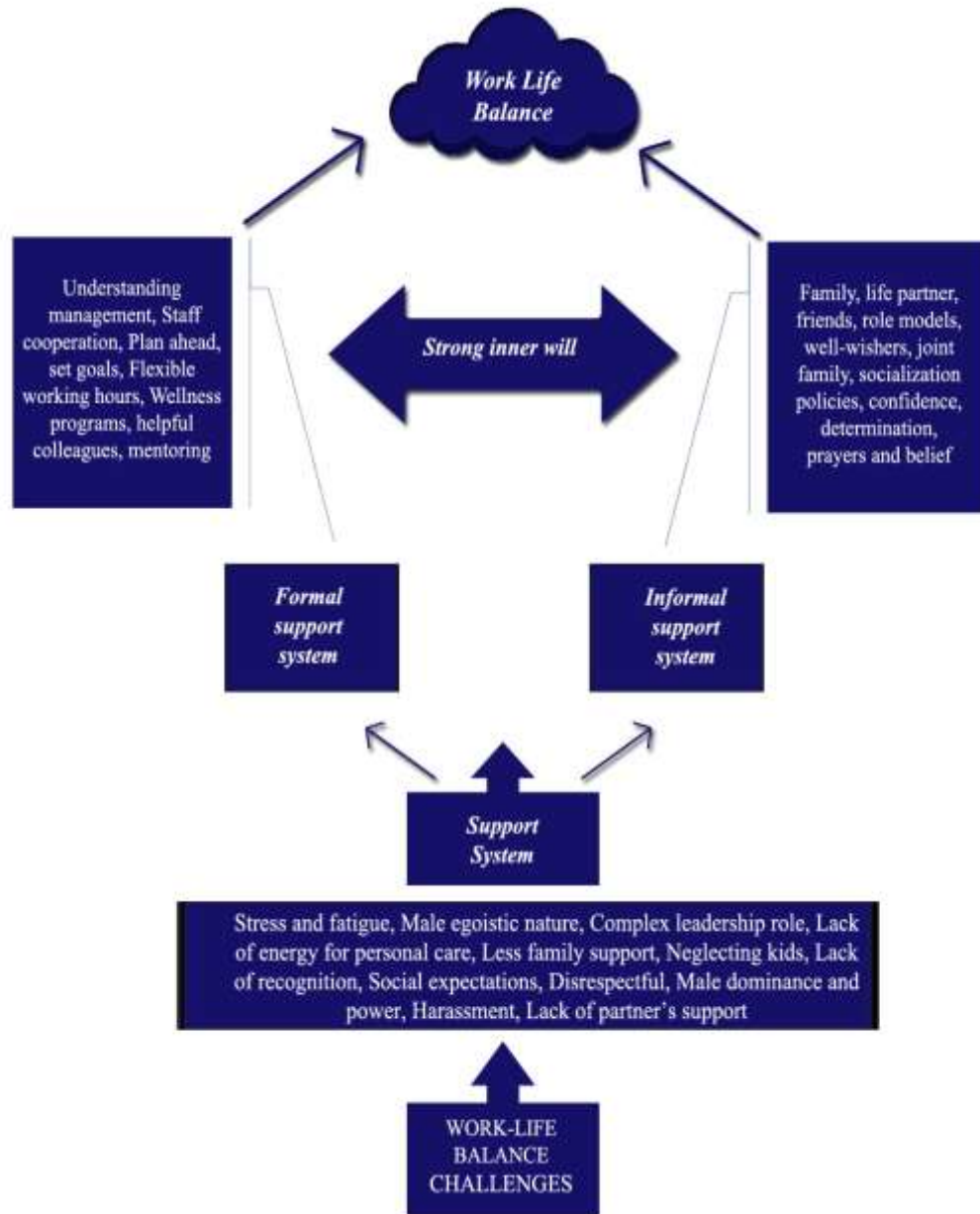
Another factor that is highlighted by many participants is having a strong inner will to advance in leadership positions and accomplish success. This inner strength is due to elements like recognition, strong religious faith, foresightedness, a sense of self-efficacy in the family, and inspiration from people from the surroundings.

The table and diagram representations below summarize the data collected from participants and the analysis points.

Table 1.

Participants ↓	Work-life balance	Challenges	Strategies / support systems	
			Formal	Informal
<b>P-1</b>	Amount of time	Lack of recognition	Heads and colleagues	Family
<b>P-2</b>	Equality	Lack of personal time	Management support and staff cooperation	Inspiration from family and role models
<b>P-3</b>	Gain satisfaction in all domains	Lack of partner's support Mental violence	Understanding heads	Strong inner will and family
<b>P-4</b>	Harmonious relationship	Cultural conflict	Understanding management	Family and friends
<b>P-5</b>	Two domains of life	Employed 24 hours	Supportive administrator	Strong will and guidance from family and friends
<b>P-6</b>	Sacred responsibilities	Neglecting kids	Understanding boss	Strong connection with husband. Rewarding comments Old unit of family
<b>P-7</b>	Delicate equilibrium	Complex juggling	Flexible working hours Socializing policies Supportive work culture	Networking with other women leaders

			Mentorship	
<b>P-8</b>	No dominance	Health issues	Sharing of experiences with colleagues	Leisure time with friends and colleagues Hobbies Personal determination
<b>P-9</b>	Set boundaries	Excessive work load	Wellness programs Colleagues Time management	Appreciation and motivation Family Breaks
<b>P-10</b>	Personal satisfaction	Harassment	Policies of institutions Increase in salary Bonuses	Appreciation Support of family and friends Internal motivation
<b>P-11</b>	Harmonious relationship	Family got affected	Supportive management and staff Pre-planning Good relationship with staff Good time management	Support of family Inspirational role models Determination and motivation
<b>P-12</b>	Unbalanced-more work	Physical and mental stress	Experience helps Proper planning Creating a system	Confident Good work environment Role of high authorities



### 5. Discussion

This study focused on three main aspects of the work-life balance phenomenon. These factors include the understanding of the concept work work-life balance, the challenges faced by the women leaders, and the strategies to overcome these challenges. Qualitative research was conducted to obtain detailed notes from 12 women leaders who are working in different educational institutions. This data was analyzed to evaluate the role of work-life balance in the lives of these women leaders. The study shows that work-life balance is a vital aspect to be understood well to attain a harmonious life by women leaders. The analysis of their responses



indicates that they have a strong understanding of the concept, the challenges linked with it, and the strategies they are utilizing in their lives.

The term work-life balance according to Jones and Westman (2013) is understood more inclusively where it is generally conceptualized as a balance between the two roles. The participants while expressing their views about what this term means said that it is a harmonious relationship between the two domains without the dominance of any one domain over the other. It is the right mix of time for accomplishing the goals of work as well as fulfilling the home expectations with complete satisfaction and inner happiness. It is referred to as according to Grzywacz & Carlson (2007) the fulfillment of the expectations which are connected to the roles residing for both work and family (Heath, 2012).

The responses of the women leaders revealed many challenges they encounter while juggling the multiple roles they have to perform in the professional and personal domains. These challenges of balancing work-life domains are stressful and exhaustive (Naseem, Faiz & Asad, 2020) and there is a noticeable impact on their personal lives and career development (Lookwood, 2003). They have many negative influences mainly on their health and personal care matters. According to Glynn (2002), these challenges are the offshoot of being unable to achieve work-life balance with a lack of control over the workload and its deliverance, it is not just the lack of time for personal care but also has effects on the achievement of personal goals and commitments.

According to Crozier-Durham (2007), managing workload plays a pivotal role in balancing work-life challenges and those who can achieve a controllable level of workload in these two domains are quite clear about the strategies they employ to achieve it. Almost all the respondents mentioned the two main support systems which are coming from their professional and personal surroundings. Women leaders receive support, according to Brue (2018) from a variety of two main sources which are inside and outside organizational sources. The outside organizational support sources are comprised of life partners, other inspirational personalities, well-wishers, and counselors whereas the inside organizational sources include female administrators and colleagues. Outside organizational sources provide women leaders with a highly confidential mechanism of sharing their problems and issues and finding sincere solutions to those challenges which help them to excel in the leadership position. On the other hand, the inside organizational sources provide the support of the other female co-workers which is the most identified and significant source due to the sharing of the same kinds of professional experiences and solutions and strategies to the challenges.

The responses showed a mixed approach towards compartmentalization between the two domains. It has been noticed that some leaders do not set boundaries and do work from home as well whereas few have clear segregations between the time they have allotted for performing the tasks at the workplace and home (Naseem, Faiz & Asad, 2020). A few also mentioned the contribution of flexibility of the administration with the timings or working hours schedules at certain occasions usually when the need arises of having flexi-time. The term flexi-time is used by Khateeb (2021) and according to him, it is the joint understanding of the working hours between the worker and bosses with a favorable outcome for both the employee and the institution. In addition to these one of the participants shared about the well-being programs termed “workplace social support” by Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio (2013) organized by the top management can also benefit the women leaders with a positive perception towards the management regarding their well-being and care by creating support resources which can include financial guidance, physical health care, social, academic and moral support activities (Khateeb, 2021).

The most positive aspect of the study was the extraordinary level of confidence shared by all the participants about their capabilities and the sense of satisfaction they gained after being able to manage and perform both responsibilities to the best level of their own, their families, and the institutions' satisfaction and expectation. As identified by Eagly and Carli (2007) the multiple roles of women leaders though are nerve-wracking but due to the self-efficacy of numerous major roles in both domains (professional and personal), they have stronger psychological and emotional health and have mental states with superior happiness and welfare feelings (Heath, 2012). It was also noticed during the data collection and analysis segment that there is another element that gives them strength spiritually and that is their belief and faith religiously. They have found the help and the guidance from prayers in their difficult times to make decisions and remain motivated and strong.

## **6. Implication**

The outcomes of the study can specifically help the women leaders to understand the consequences of the challenges of work-life balance and the ways to deal with them. The strategies and solutions shared by the participants, having their services as leaders from a maximum of more than 25 years and a minimum of 2 years, can not only provide the struggling women leaders insight and motivation towards achieving excellence but also give them a positive perspective to remain strong and confident during this struggle filled journey. The study also presents a picture of the reality of the life of women leaders and how this continuous struggle influences their personality, performance, and health therefore this can assist the higher level administration and the policy makers to outline the employees' policy accordingly.

Further research could include women leaders and teachers from both private and public sectors. There is a need to study further that with the sprouting role of women specifically as leaders, is there a transformation in the role of men also to match with the dual nature of the role of women that is as bread earners and home developers. There is a need for further study involving the male members of society to highlight and create an awareness about their role as the most significant and motivating factor to attain work-life balance by women leaders. More studies can be conducted to especially look into the effects of mentoring, counseling, stress management sessions, and health care programs for women leaders which will provide them ways to reduce stress improve their health, and achieve work-life balance.

One of the theories discussed in the literature review was "Segmented theory" and according to the perspective presented by the pioneers of this theory is that there is an absence of an interaction between work life and personal life and both are considered separate entities (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). This study negates this segmented theory and presents a clear understanding of the link between the two domains because the dominance of one role affects the other in various ways i.e. the performance of the women leaders and more specifically their health both mental and physical. This supports the second theory "Spillover", which is a theory opposite to the segmentation theory. It argues that work and personal life are integrated because the proficiencies of one domain influence the proficiencies of another domain (Kiran, & Batool, 2022). The study presents the effect of the imbalance in one domain on the other either in the form of giving less time to kids or ignoring personal health as suggested by Guest (2002) the work of one domain can have an impact on the other domain roles positively or negatively (Heath, 2012).

## **7. Future research**

The role of the life partner was considered one of the very important social informal support systems for women leaders who are married to deal with the multiple roles they have at home and work. Gordon and Whelan (2004) highlight the worth of the impact of the husband's role as one of the most significant influences on gaining satisfaction and work-life balance. To

maintain a balance between these two domains there must be strong bonding of the women with their co-partners. Further research should investigate more on this element not only the importance of it but for the strategies that can help make the male member of the family realize the importance of working women and their contribution which ultimately will motivate them to be fully helpful and the most motivating partner of the family.

We did not find any specific policies at the corporate or administrative level to deal with the conflict between work and family so more study needs to be conducted to assist the policymakers of the organizations to especially look into this serious matter and formulize policies including mentoring, counseling and health care programs which will provide the women leaders ways to reduce the stress and mental pressure. It also leads the future study to analyze the effects of mentoring and counseling sessions on the ability of women leaders to attain a balance between work and life responsibilities.

## **8. Conclusion**

To conclude, in this study, the aim was to highlight the perspectives of work-life balance in this contemporary time according to the women leaders in educational institutions, discuss the challenges faced by them, the impact of those challenges on their wellbeing and to explore the strategies used by them to overcome the challenges. The study revealed that women leaders are aware of the challenges they face and they strive to find solutions in their capacities through formal and informal support source systems. Although the study did not find any official or formal policies at the institutional level to support female leaders the women leaders have experienced several strategies at personal levels to deal with this issue. They feel content and resilient in their multiple roles in families and at the workplace by staying focused and confident in their capabilities of dealing with multiple roles and handling them competently. The study consistently showed that women leaders take up the complexity of their roles to the utmost consideration that they should be able to fulfill their responsibilities in both domains effectively and efficiently. They sometimes, as extracted from their interviews, get burdened and stressed with the hectic schedule of both home and work responsibilities, and at the same time, they occasionally become ignorant about their personal health and leisure time. Yet there are strategies shared by them that can be beneficial for other women striving to achieve equilibrium between the two domains' roles, who want to advance in their careers, and for those who are trying to pursue careers as leaders.

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