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Disentangling Work-Family Conflict, Support, and Turnover Intentions – Quanti-Quali Mixed Method Approach

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We also declare that we had taken ethical approval from the relevant bodies in Oman to conduct this study.

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Dr. Rakesh Belwal possesses a mix of academic, professional, and administrative experience in both teaching and business. He has a rich experience in tertiary-level teaching at different institutions. In addition to teaching, he has provided training programs to government, public, and private sector officials in India, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Oman. Dr. Rakesh has published extensively in leading journals and has participated in several conferences. He has served on the academic panels of different universities and has won some prestigious research grants. He also serves the University of Queensland Business School, Australia as an Adjunct Associate Professor.

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Dr. Shweta Belwal is currently working as a Lecturer in Human Resource Management at Plymouth Business School, Plymouth University, UK. Before this, she served as an associate professor in the Faculty of Business at Sohar University, Oman. She brings with her almost two-decades-long experience of teaching and research from different internationally known institutions such as Sohar University (Oman), Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Mekelle University (Ethiopia), and Kumaun University (India). She has published widely in research journals and conferences and has been a co-investigator in several competitive research grants.

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Dr. Suhaila has over 26 years of teaching experience both at the University of Bahrain and at Sultan Qaboos University. She has completed her Ph.D. at Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her research work goes beyond the topic to include knowledge management, corporate governance, interpersonal skills, and other topics within the area of management. Her academic goal is to spread the knowledge of emotional intelligence in organizations both in Bahrain and Oman, with a focus on improving and increasing awareness in the area. She has conducted many training workshops over the years, as well as consultancy work, and supervised Master's and Ph.D. students. Dr. Suhaila has published several individual and joint research articles as well as two books. Her association and membership in professional bodies have added to her academic experience and widened her research knowledge.

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Abstract

The turnover rate of Omani women in the private sector is high and employers face difficulties in retaining women productively in jobs. By assessing work-family conflict (WFC), this study probes the challenges and associated issues facing women in private-sector jobs in Oman. This research took a mixed form of exploratory and descriptive research techniques. A structured questionnaire was administered face to face to secure direct responses from the 466 Omani women in the private sector organizations using quota sampling. The study found that time-based and strain-based work conditions affect the families of women significantly. Married women, particularly those having infants or school-age children, face significantly higher work-family conflict in the private sector, exhibiting, in certain cases, high turnover intentions. Almost half of the women workers lack organizational support, whilst the vast majority of female employees receive assistance from their families. Almost half of them either think about quitting or switching to a better job. The research suggests organizations and the government make appropriate policies to address WFC spillover and the workforce's unfavorable perception of organizational support. The study reveals how Oman's social structure aids in extending familial support to female employees and how Oman has overcome some of the primary sociocultural barriers that are faced by women in the rest of the Islamic world.

Keywords: WLB, WFC, Women Workers, Qualitative, Quantitative, Oman, Private Sector

Introduction

Located at the cusp of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, Oman is one of the prominent countries in the Middle East. It shares common boundaries with the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Since the discovery of oil reserves in the 1970s, Oman has witnessed a major transformation in its industry and workforce. Working mothers in Oman have grown by a factor of four since 1984 (Al-Shaibany, 2017). However, unlike the West, the composition of women in the private sector of Oman and their employment at top levels have remained dismally low (Belwal and Belwal, 2014; Kemp and Madsen, 2014; Belwal and Belwal, 2017; Powell et al., 2019; Anonymous, 2021).

Currently, women's employment in Oman can be understood from their overall strength in the private and government sectors. In aggregate, women comprise only 10% of the Omani workforce (NCSI, 2017). Facing an excessive dependence on expatriates, Oman has taken severe measures of localization (Omanization). Notwithstanding, the proportion of Omani (indigenous) women in the total workforce (indigenous plus expatriates) stands as low as 6%. Although the percentage of women in the government sector has increased (to 41%), it has not increased as much in the private sector (25%). This gap, *prima facie*, indicates that Omani women are either not attracted to private-sector jobs or are hesitant to work in the private sector for reasons not very well-grounded in research. The general perception among stakeholders reveals that women perceive government jobs as lucrative — offering better amenities, salaries, incentives, and benefits and lower Work-Family Conflicts (WFC). Attracting women to private-sector jobs, therefore, remains a challenge and needs serious research and policy interventions.

This situation is not different for the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Women's employment is a big concern in the GCC or MENA in general. Although more women than men enroll in university courses, their participation in the labor force thereafter declines significantly, particularly around mid-career, when many women quit to have their first child (Dunlop et al., 2015). Only a few women return to work, and consequently, they only make up 38% of the workforce in the GCC and 21% in the Middle East and North Africa after leaving (Dunlop et al., 2015). Working women in MENA countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Bahrain, and Qatar, prefer to work in the public sector and a majority of those who work in the private sector quit after marriage (ILO, 2016). Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, the three largest economies of the region employ very few women, less than 20% of all senior managers, demanding strategies and concrete actions to attract and retain women (PwC, 2022). A recent study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) reports some momentous progress in women's employment in MENA as they reach 40% compared to 64% across the OECD (PwC, 2022).

In Oman, the majority of women work in education, health, media, banking, and other services, and gender discrimination is not a major issue on the ground (Belwal and Belwal, 2014; Kemp and Madsen, 2014; Belwal and Belwal, 2017). Deep down, though, they are more inclined to quit because of the pressures from work and their families, balancing multiple tasks, and handling difficult situations (Belwal and Belwal, 2012). Oman has long needed a thorough investigation into the issues facing female employees, notably those related to WFC, as well as issues like job burnout, detachment, and depressive symptoms linked to employment in the private sector (Wood et al., 2010). However, there aren't many studies highlighting the WFC that Omani women experience. More specifically, research on WFC, especially the impact of time, strain, and behavior-based interferences on turnover in the private sector is missing.

Around 20 years ago, Al-Lamki (1998) identified some barriers deterring Omani students from working in the private sector; such as limited annual leave, compensation, and end of service

benefits at one hand and longer working hours and expectations to work on the weekends on the other. Many positive changes in societal outlook toward women, labour laws, and organizational policies have taken place since 2008 (Belwal et al., 2020). However, considerable gaps in Work-Family issues exist cross-nationally (Powell et al., 2019). There is a need for fresh studies to fill such gaps (Belwal and Belwal, 2014; Kemp and Madsen, 2014; Belwal and Belwal, 2017). Deeper studies on work-family conflict and associated issues related to women's turnover in private-sector jobs are, therefore, important to be conducted. This research contributes to the literature in identifying the types of WFC that affect Omani women workers, the extent to which these WFC define the turnover intention, and the role of support from organizations and families in retaining women workers. The study follows the exploratory cum descriptive research design and the quantitative-qualitative mixed method approach and targets Omani women employed in the private sector. It analyses the perspectives of 466 women respondents selected using quota sampling to examine the connection between work-family conflict, support, and the intention to leave. Theoretically, in the context of organizational and family support (Roles and Resources), the study bridges the gaps between three distinct forms of WFC (time, strain, and behavioral conflicts) and their relationship with overarching turnover intention from the perspectives of WFC theory, Role theory, and Conservation of Resource theory.

Literature Review

The recent initiatives in the Western world have broadened the work-family research by incorporating advanced theoretical frameworks of work-family enrichment, facilitation, and positive spillover, representing positive work-life interdependencies, and role boundary management and transitions (Powell et al., 2019) whereby benefits or performance in one role can improve outcomes in another role usually through facilitation (Grawitch et al., 2013). Not much of this sort has been seen hitherto in the developing world, primarily due to the lack of research as well as social/organizational support (Belwal and Belwal, 2017; Belwal et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

WFC and turnover intentions

WFC consequences can lead to three possible outcomes: work-related (e.g. job satisfaction and turnover intentions), non-work-related (e.g. marital, family, and life satisfaction), and stress-related (e.g., juggling, psychological pressure, and poor health) (Allen & Armstrong, 2006). Effective solution to WFC problems has been instrumental in increasing employees' affective commitment and productivity and in decreasing their turnover (Wood and de Menezes, 2008; Daverth, Hyde, and Cassell, 2016). Research in the global context has found a positive relationship between WFC and turnover intention or FWC and turnover intention (Amstad et al. 2011; Liu et al., 2020).

Brandon (2011) notes that a large influx of married mothers into paid employment has unearthed the complexities of work and family in modern life, particularly in the context of managing time and roles such as parental, family, and child obligations. The increased work pressure has caused work-family conflicts, reduced participation, job burnout, low productivity, increased absenteeism, and high turnover among employees (Nagar, 2012; Casini et al., 2013; Manasa and Showry, 2018). Time and family demands have prevented some women from participating in the labour force and have forced others to settle for jobs that do not commensurate with their skills (Brandon 2011).

WFC forms and directions

Some researchers contemplate work-family conflict bi-directional, comprising (i) work-to-family conflict (WFC) involving pressures from work spilling over into family life, and (ii) family-to-work conflict (FWC) involving stressors like a low level of spousal support, and number and age of children (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010; Wang et al., 2020).

Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) envisage WFC as a combination of three forms - time, strain, and behaviour and two directions - work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW). Using these three forms and two directions, they categorize six types of WFC: time-based WIF, time-based FIW, strain-based WIF, strain-based FIW, behaviour-based WIF, and behaviour-based FIW. The three forms of WFC based on - time, strain, and behaviour are well-grounded in previous research. The logic holds that time-at-work depletes time available for family and thus creates conflicts of time (Haar, 2013), multiple roles inevitably cause strain (Marks, 1977), and incompatibilities between the role behaviour cause behavioural conflicts (Burke, 1988).

Organisational support and WFC

At the organizational level, the management of WFC takes structural and cultural dimensions. Whilst the structural dimension covers formal HR policies and measures such as offering flexibility to employees at work, the cultural dimension entails informal elements such as informal support from managers or co-workers (Daverth, Hyde, and Cassell, 2016; Feeney and Stritch, 2019). Rooted in the resource-based view and strategic HRM practices, strategies following the structural and cultural dimensions aim to cultivate employees for the long-term success of the organization (Mescher et al., 2010), where authentic organizational support is crucial to safeguard employees (Kossek et al., 2011; Moideenkutty et al., 2011; McCarthy et al., 2013; Braun and Peus, 2018; Kulik, 2019). Well-spelled-out human resource policies, practices, and organizational support induce organizational commitment and reduce turnover intent (Nichols et al., 2016; Yu, 2019).

Family support and WFC

Besides policies, practices, and organisational support, family support also plays an equally important role in balancing work-life situations (Mazerolle and Goodman, 2013). In Oman's

communal society, the majority of Omani women receive support from their family members who usually live in proximity (Hallward and Bekdash, 2019). Researchers have also identified other supportive measures that reconcile work and family life. Paid maternity and paternity leaves, pre-schooling, childcare support, and the provision of part-time work or flexible hours are common in developed countries like the UK (Waldfoegel, 2011). There are flexible work policies that help organizations in dealing with the problems of inconvenient work hours with overtime or other participatory roles (Subramaniam and Selvaratnam, 2010; Lott, 2020). These policies, popularly known as Family-Friendly Policies (FFPs) enable employees to decide when, what, where, and how to work and improve their work environment, organizational commitment, satisfaction, and quality of work life (QWL) (Porter and Ayman, 2010; Kulik, 2019). FFPs help in reducing their grievances, absenteeism, and turnover (Havlovic, 1991; Feeney and Stritch, 2019). The lack of well-structured human-resource policies and strategies is the major obstacle to women's progress and development in Oman (Goveas and Aslam, 2011; Belwal et al., 2020).

WFC and cultural context

The concept of WFC is not amenable to a precise definition due to the differences in cultural traditions, family structures, societal institutions as well as women's position in organizations and their educational background (Chandra, 2012; Kemp and Madsen, 2014); and needs a different understanding than the perspective emerging from the West (Hassan, 2010). Although there is no dearth of WFC research globally, only a few studies have pioneered to look at the WFC challenges in the Middle East in general and Oman in particular. Furthermore, it is important to broaden the understanding of WFC from the perspective of organizational support, family support, and turnover intent for gaining deeper insights into the regional context.

The studies conducted globally highlight work stress and flexibility as the most important factors in WFC and turnover relationship (Allen et al., 2013; Han et al., 2015; Mauno et al., 2015; Kelly & Tranby, 2011; Nomaguchi, 2012; Schooreel & Verbruggen, 2016; Tummers & Bronkhorst, 2014; Pan & Yeh, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019; Noermijati et al., 2020; Peltokorpi & Michel, 2020). However, little is known about the existence and efficacy of support or behaviour in organizations that ameliorate WFC and associated stress, and reduce job turnover. Baltes et al. (2003) find that the use of general selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) behaviors reduce both job and family stressors and work-in-family (WIF) conflict and family-in-work (FIW) conflict. However, not much has been studied in the context of family and organisational support in the unique context of the Middle East. Resources such as co-worker/supervisor support as well as domestic help for women had a protective effect against WFC (Jansen et al., 2003).

Theoretical underpinning and research questions

The participation of women in the labour force contributes to social and economic growth (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Suh, 2017). According to Suh (2017), at least three general theoretical camps persistently explain the influential patterns of female labour force participation. The first one is the modernization theory which assumes a positive relationship between female labour force participation and development; and the second one is the world system theory, which considers economic growth as the catalyst for female labour force participation, suggesting a higher level of marginality among lower-class families. According to the U-shaped female participation curve propounded by Sinha, women lack participation during the early industrialization stage due to physical limitations, social stigma, gender discrimination, and the domestic demands of large families until white-collar jobs, which reward education, emerge (Fatima and Sultana, 2009). Whilst the falling part of the curve corresponds to the world system theory, the rising part of the U curve corroborates with the modernization theory (Suh, 2017). The third theory informing WFC based on resource scarcity is Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources (COR) theory which suggests that workers need resources, which are often scarce and conflicting. Any failure or threat in gaining access to resources causes stress (Hobfoll et al. 2018) among individuals and protecting such resource loss or gain makes them defensive (Hobfoll 1989). All in all, these theories and views indicate that socio-economic conditions, education, and economic opportunities have a direct bearing on women's roles at work and home. Accordingly, women's participation in the labour force has affected women differently in different cultural setups (Göksel, 2013; Fernandez, 2013; Hakan et al., 2015). It also brings to them some adverse effects such as juggling, work-family conflict, psychological pressure, stress, poor health, and job turnovers.

COR theory and the associated scarcity of resources has been further looked up by considering the role of organisations, families, and society in different cultural context. WFC research models, driven by role theory, manifest the adaptations of the person-environment fit and occupational stress (Brough et al., 2014). Any lack in this adaptation surfaces in the form of Work-Family conflict, which according to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77) is "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect." The roles played by the organisation, families, and society can be seen in the form of support and their merit can be exhibited by the findings where women possessing at least one form of support were observed as less distressed than women who had none (Westman et al., 2004).

The tenets of the role theory explain that the roles are the lynchpin between individual and organizational theories as they represent mutual expectations and are the building blocks of the social system (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Schuler, Aldag, and Brief, 1977). Whilst functional roles support individuals and organisations, dysfunctional roles cause role conflict and ambiguity resulting in tension, turnover, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and reduced performance (Schuler, Aldag, and Brief, 1977). This research looks at the WFC of women from the conservation of

resources (COR) framework and role theory and investigates the role of families and organizations in their turnover intentions (Hobfoll, 1989; Westman et al., 2004).

More specifically, this study investigates WFC issues faced by Omani women who work in the private sector in Oman to seek answers to the following three research questions:

RQ1: What are the most pressing forms and directions of WFC facing Omani women workers in the private sector?

RQ2: To what extent, does WFC define the intention of women in the private sector to leave jobs?

RQ3: What role does the support from organizations and families play in retaining women in private sector jobs?

Methods and measures

Methods

This research took a mixed form of exploratory and descriptive research techniques. A structured questionnaire was designed to collect primary data related to the research problem namely WFC, organizational support, family support, and turnover intent. The structured questionnaire is the best tool to learn about the ideas, knowledge, feelings, opinions/attitudes, and self-reported behaviors of a defined population objectively (Phellas et al., 2011). The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and pilot tested. Discussions with the research team members and HR professionals were held to enhance the quality and predictive validity of data (Patton, 1999). The use of a self-administered questionnaire was evaded knowing that the majority of target respondents who had less than secondary education will not understand the nuances of the itemized statements of different constructs and would need some explanation to convey a valid response. Therefore, the questionnaires were administered face-to-face on one-on-one basis to women working in private sector organisations in Oman to secure direct responses from them in a reliable, timely, and structured manner (Fink and Kosecoff, 1985).

Samples were drawn using quota-cum purposive sampling based on the organizations and the distribution of working women in different regions of Oman. According to the Oman Statistical Handbook, 38,000 Omani women are working in the private sector. Statistically, a confidence interval of 10 and a confidence limit of 99% leads to a sample size of 170 – obtained using an online calculator available at <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>. The target for quantitative studies was raised four times (680), keeping in view the use of quota sampling, the number of constructs, and a need for compiling a respectable dataset for the application of advanced tools as a post hoc analysis. We targetted women in different Governorates of Oman- 160 in Muscat, 180 in Al Batinah, 20 in Musandam, 40 in Adh-Dhahirah, 80 in Ad-Dakhiliyah, 100 in Ash-Sharqiyah, 20 in Al-Wusta, 60 in Dhofar, and 20 in Al-Buraimi, in

proportion to their representation in the population (Table 1). The purpose was to select representative organizations from private sectors in Oman that have established HR functions and policies. Respondent organizations were contacted through emails, telephone calls, or personal visits after the necessary ethical and administrative approvals. Arabic-speaking students were trained to facilitate the administration of questionnaires in respondents' organizations during official work hours.

<Take in Table 1 here>

The final dataset included a total of 466 women working in different governorates of Oman (Table 1). Forty-seven percent of women belonged to the 25-30 age group. On aggregate, 88% of the women were between 25 and 40 years of age (Table 2). Almost half of the women studied up to diploma level, whilst 17% had an advanced diploma, 26% had a bachelor's, and 4% had master's or Ph.D. degrees. All of them were working in the private sector in areas such as manufacturing (50%), services (31%), and others (18%). They were working at the supervisory and managerial level (47%), operational and technical level (47%), and professional level (6%) in their organizations.

<Take in Table 2 here>

Nearly half of them belonged to the manufacturing sector. Almost 6% worked in agriculture and mining, 31% worked in services such as education, health, hotels, financial institutions, and transport and communication, and the remaining 13% in construction, utility, wholesale and retail sectors. Their experience varied from a minimum of one year to a maximum of 27 years. Most of them had a minimum experience of 5 years, although their average experience was 7.5 years. Additionally, 34% percent of the women were never married, 63% were married, and 3% were widowed or divorced. The spouses of 87% of the women were in a full-time job, 7% part-time, 4% unemployed, and 2% ill or unable to work. Approximately 80% of the women had children to manage. Nearly 78% had three or fewer children. The statistical average for the number of children per woman was 2.5. Excluding 4% of married women who had no children, nearly 11% had one child less than 6 months to manage, 15% between 6 months to 1 year, 50% between 1-5 years, and 20% more than five years old.

Quantitative analysis (using descriptive statistics) was used to summarize the findings factored according to the variables of interest such as WFC (WIF and FIW), organizational support, family support, and turnover intent. WFC was measured by the instrument proposed by Carlson et al., (2000) whilst organizational support and family support were measured using the short version of Perceived Organizational Support- 16 items measure developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986). Turnover intent was measured using Balfour and Wechsler's (1996) scale measuring two attributes 'desire to remain' and 'perceived job alternatives.' Radar diagrams were used to depict and analyze the frequency of different dimensions of WIF and FIW. The overall significance of the impact of different WFC dimensions was measured using One-Sample t-Test and the comparisons (based on gender,

age, and education) were made using an Independent Sample t-Test and ANOVA (Groebner et al., 2013). The Reliability of different constructs was measured using Cronbach's Alpha scores. Finally, correlation and regression analyses of different WFC dimensions with turnover intention were performed and discussed. To ensure the validity of the outcomes, findings were informally discussed with the research assistants, workers, and managers, as these work best when particular processes or procedures can be observed, measured, and analyzed for either skill, knowledge, or other types of performance discrepancies (McClelland, 1994b). Some informative quotes emerging from the face-to-face interactions were also considered to compare and corroborate the findings. Discussions with a few stakeholders were held to gain additional insights into areas that lacked clarity from an individual perspective (McClelland, 1994a).

Analyses and Findings

Work-life Balance

As per Carlson et al. (2000), WFC of women was studied from the perspective of three types of conflicts (time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based) and two directions (work interfering with family-WIF and family interfering with work-FIW) leading altogether to the six dimensions: (i) Time-based work interference with family (TB-WIF), (ii) Time-based family interference with work (TB-FIW), (iii) Strain-based work interference with family (SB-WIF), (iv) Strain-based family interference with work (SB-FIW), (v) Behaviour-based work interference with family (BB-WIF), and (vi) Behaviour-based family interference with work (BB-FIW). A descriptive account of items forming these six dimensions of WLC is presented below which could be understood comparatively well from Figure 2. The statements describing the items are put below for easy interpretation and to take on the constituents of each WFC dimension.

<Take in Figure 2 here>

Time-based work interference with family (TB-WIF)

The majority of women feel that the time they devote to their jobs keeps them from participating in family activities and household responsibilities. This can be inferred from Radar Diagram 2a for TB-WIF1 and TB-WIF2 where a high number of absolute responses tilt the corner point towards the “strongly agree” and “agree” sides. Similarly, a vast majority of women workers miss family activities due to their engagements at work as indicated by TB-WIF3. Very few responses in absolute terms are tilted towards the disagreement side for all three items under this scale. Hence, the vast majority of women are affected by time-based work interference with family (Figure 2a). Similarly, other Radar Diagrams can be interpreted for the rest of the dimensions. The coverage below only presents the key highlights.

“I leave my baby from 7 am and sometimes I have to leave him with my mother and sisters for late hours at evening to have time for house's responsibilities and my study duties.” (Bachelor's, Supervisory & Managerial, 4, 25-30, Indoor, OMR 500-1000,

Assistant Manager, Bank). The information given in parenthesis is to be read following the given scheme (Education, Position, Work Experience, Age, Nature of work, monthly income, Job title, Organisation type).

Time-based family interference with work (TB-FIW)

Nearly half of the women deny (disagree/ strongly disagree) the time-based interference of family responsibilities on their work. Altogether, there exists a mixed effect of time-based family interference with work, it interferes only in the case of one-third of women (Figure 2 b).

“My parents are older and need help so I should stay at home to take care of them, these are psychological and physical challenges for me. Sometimes, I am late to work.” (Secondary School, Supervisory & Managerial, 3, 25-30, Indoor, Below OMR 500, Administrative, Manufacturing).

Strain-based work interference with family (SB-WIF)

Almost three-quarters of women find it hard to participate in family responsibilities after returning home from work, half of them feel emotionally drained, and due to work stress the majority are unable to do things they otherwise enjoy. This implies that a vast majority of women feel strain-based work interference with family (Figure 2c).

“I need to follow up with my children’s study and find time for them. My time does not suit them as I come back home late and sometimes I delay their going to bed to finish their homework.” (Secondary School, Supervisory & Managerial, 3, 31-40, Mixed, Below OMR 500, Sales Manager, Showroom).

Strain-based family interference with work (SB-FIW)

Almost half of the women deny that stress at home makes them preoccupied with family matters at work. However, a little less than half of them deny that stress from family responsibilities affects their concentration at work but admit that tension and anxiety from family life weaken their ability to work. Altogether, women are divided on the issue of strain-based family interference with work; however, it still affects at least one-third of them (Figure 2d).

“I live far away from my family and I don’t have anyone to look after my kids, so I leave them with the housemaid.” (Bachelor's, Supervisory & Managerial, 6, 25-30, Indoor, OMR 500-1000, Clerk, Manufacturing).

Behavior-based work interference with family (BB-WIF)

Women are equally divided in sharing that problem-solving behaviour at work remains effective in tackling problems at home. A relatively higher number of women admit that the behaviors effective at work help them in parenting. Overall, we find that the behaviors effective at work help women in improving general productivity at home and parenting rather than solving problems (Figure 2e).

“I work from 8:30 am to 9:00 pm. In the break, I go home to clean the house, wash clothes and attend to other work because I return home at 9:00 pm and I don’t have time to do anything

after that.” (Secondary School, Supervisory & Managerial, 3, 31-40, Mixed, Below OMR 500, Sales Manager, Showroom).

Behavior-based family interference with work (BB-FIW)

A larger number of women feel that the behaviors effective at home are also effective at work. Overall, some four-fifth of the women find behaviors effective at home helpful in remaining effective, and productive, and in solving problems at work (Figure 2 f).

“Sometimes I have to tell my manager some of my circumstances at home to make him understand. The relationship between the manager and the team members is like one family and we do not need anything official in dealing with any problem.” (Bachelor's, Supervisory & Managerial, 9, 31-40, Indoor, Above OMR 1000, Lead importing, Manufacturing).

The overall significance of the impact of WFC on Women Workers

The analysis of aggregate scores, using One-Sample t-Test, reveals that women are significantly affected by strain-based WIF (mean = 2.09, $t = -19.460$, sig. 0.000), and time-based WIF (mean = 2.23, $t = -16.241$, sig. 0.000). However, they are not significantly affected by time-based FIW (mean 3.20 =, $t = 4.353$, sig. 0.000). The mean score of 1 represents strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree. The lower the score below 3, the more intense would be the WFC, and the higher the score above 3 the less intense it would be. This indicates that for the majority of women, the direction of interference was from work to family rather than family to work, and the dominant interference types were time-based and strain-based.

A post hoc analysis using an independent sample t-test for the six WLB dimensions between never married and married women reveal that married women face significantly higher (mean difference = .21025; $t = 2.131$; $df = 473$; Sig. = .034) time-based WIF. It is to be noted that 75% of the married women had at least one dependent child less than five years of age (Table 4). The widowed and divorced were excluded from this analysis as they were few (2 and 15, respectively). Furthermore, the age-wise distribution of mean scores for work-family conflict dimensions reveals that women in the age group of “31-40” face a higher level of WFC followed by women who are in the “more than 40” age group (Figure 3).

<Take In Figure 3>

Education-wise, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the aggregate scores for all the WLB dimensions reveals a significant difference too (Table 3).

<Take in Table 3 here>

A closer observation of the mean scores indicates that WFC problems affect lowly-educated women more (i.e., those having a “diploma or below”). Women having higher education report comparatively less intense WFC (Table 4).

<Take in Table 4 here>

Organizational and Family Support

A comparison of organizational and family support received by women is presented in Figure 4. The majority of the women responded that their organizations value their contribution and help if they have any problem (Mode = 2: Agree). However, relatively fewer women agree that organizations care for their opinion, well-being, and general satisfaction and feel that their organization could hire someone at a lower salary to replace them, given the opportunity. Whilst one-fifth denies receiving support from their organization, nearly a quarter of them remain neutral. On the contrary, on the same scale, a vast majority of women acknowledge strongly (Mode = 1: Strongly Agree) the support they receive from their families. This reveals that women receive more support and care from their families than from their organizations.

“I derive my strength from the family. Without my family [my mother, father, and sisters], I couldn't complete 8 years in the work” (Secondary School, Supervisory & Managerial, 6, 25-30, Mixed, Below OMR 500, Front Office, Manufacturing).

<Take in Figure 4 here>

Turnover Intent

The research reveals that almost 37% of women think about quitting their job. Whilst nearly 41% deny it and 21% remain indecisive. However, more than half of them intend to look for a job in the coming year. Table 5 presents bivariate correlations between turnover intentions and six WFC dimensions. The values of Cronbach's Alpha for organizational support, family support, and turnover intention were .8880, .8050, and .7640, respectively. All WLB dimensions reveal a positive and significant correlation with turnover intention. However, multiple regression analysis of these six dimensions over turnover intention indicates that only strain-based WIF and strain-based FIW make a significant positive impact on turnover intention ($\beta = .226$, $t = 2.851$, $p = .005$ and $\beta = .156$, $t = 2.34$, $p = .019$, respectively).

“Yes, I decided to quit the job 3 times. The first time, because of the work pressure that I faced. The second time, because I got a job offer in another place. The last time, because I couldn't bear with working hours, until now I cannot bear with the long working hours.” (Diploma, Supervisory & Managerial, 4, 25-30, Indoor, Below OMR 500, Clerk, Logistical Services).

<Take in Table 5 here>

Discussion

The employment of Omani women in private-sector jobs has always been a cause of concern in Oman. The private sector jobs did not find many takers, among women, primarily due to sociocultural issues (Al-Azri, 2012; Al Hasani, 2015; Belwal and Belwal, 2017). Work and career aspects are subordinate to family-related duties to many (Anonymous, 2021). The reasons are still not clear in the extant literature, particularly in the context of Oman. In one instance it indicates occupational segregation as indicative of women's preferences for family over career (Hakim, 1991; Rubery, 2019), whilst another general reason that emerged predominantly in this research is the high degree of WFC that makes women unstable in private-sector jobs. This finding is in line with other global studies (Allen & Armstrong, 2006;

Mauno et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019; Noermijati et al., 2020; Peltokorpi & Michel, 2020). What this detailed study found novel and interesting is that a majority of women in the private sector are prone to time-based and strain-based interferences of work to family type. This study found that most women feel emotionally drained when they get into their homes from work and find themselves unable to serve their families or do things they usually enjoy. Alternatively, some women who remain preoccupied with home matters develop stress that weakens their concentration and ability to do a job –a strain-based family-to-work type WFC. Unlike the West, time-based and strain-based interferences have been more predominant in developing economies where the resources are limited (Hobfoll, 1989; Suh, 2017; Wang et al., 2020).

The outcomes indicate that women get outstanding support from their families, but not much, as they expect, from their organizations. Lacking organisational support, they feel job insecurity and complain about the organization's apathy to their opinion, well-being, and general satisfaction. However, they need organisational support along the structural and cultural dimensions (Kossek, 2011; Batty, 2016; Mescher et al., 2010). Women's exceptionally high rating of family support is justifiable from the perspective of Oman's culture of extended families that relieve them from taking care of household chores, children, and sick during work hours. Some women receive support from domestic help, mainly expatriate housemaids. Therefore, family support and domestic help enable women to bear the brunt of WFC (Mazerolle and Goodman, 2013). These findings are in line with the recent observations of Hallward and Bekdash (2019). Our findings also uncover the lack of structural support from organizations to these women in the form of well-entrenched HR policies that should ideally comply with the Omani Labour Law (Belwal et al., 2020). Consequently, women prefer government jobs that offer better structural support and timings (7 am to 2:30 pm) and are beneficial for married women who have infants or school-going children (Belwal et al., 2020).

The outcomes of our research also find links between women's WFC issues and their organizational commitment, and turnover intent, as more than one-third, always think about quitting their job or searching for a better job. It emerges from One-Sample t-Test that a vast majority of women face WFC of 'work interfering with family' type. However, the regression analysis reveals that the two-way strain-based interference (WIF and FIW) significantly informs the turnover intent. This gives a possibility to the proposition that family support moderates the relationship between WFC and turnover intention, and the lack of family support can be considered as FIW. The strain (alternatively the stress) felt by women has been cited as an important reason for turnover in previous research (Marks, 1977; Carlson et al., 2000; Belwal and Belwal, 2012; Batty, 2016). This indicates a need for the design and implementation of appropriate support policies aiming at better workforce participation, WLB, and QWL. Such bi-directional facilitations can win over bi-directional conflicts, thereby enhancing working women's satisfaction with work and nonwork life (Powell et al., 2019; Grawitch et al., 2013).

Another issue that drags our attention concerning WFC is the profile of women workers. Largely, those who have low levels of education suffer more from WFC issues. One may wonder, what informs women's (who have higher educational qualifications) scanty employment in the private sector commensurate to the number of pass-outs from HEI and their WFC and turnover intentions (HEIC, 2013)? One plausible answer over and above WFC could be the mismatch in their educational achievements and labour market needs as highlighted by Khan and Fernandez-Carag (2016) or the mismatch between the nature of their job and their specialized degree (Brandon 2011; Belwal et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020), causing incompatibility, frustration, and stress (Brough et al., 2014). Consequently, despite realizing an increase in the number of female graduates post-1970 like the West, Oman faces extreme dissimilarities in their joining the private sector workforce or occupying senior roles and positions. According to Anonymous (2021), thus far, only those women who develop "adaptive tendencies," survived the work in Oman. These findings shed some light on why contextual differences matter to WFC and work-life balance theory (Powell et al., 2019).

Practical Contribution

The study shares key insights on what women employees in Oman prefer and what the government and private sector organizations can offer to attract and retain women in private-sector jobs. This study discovers that women, particularly in the 31-40 age group who are married and have responsibilities of children, or those who are less educated face higher WFC. Since managing family and work simultaneously demands personal and professional adjustments, these issues need the serious attention of authorities in designing well-entrenched employment policies and job contracts. Given the disparity, private sector organizations need to match the support extended by the public organizations in Oman (Goveas and Aslam, 2011; Feeney and Stritch, 2019). In line with Belwal et al. (2020), the role of regulatory agencies and their regular monitoring is important for the design and dispensation of appropriate HR policies. Supporting employees, particularly women in the private sector, would give organizations a boost in performance, productivity, and reductions in cost, turnover, and absenteeism. Locally, for Oman, the research reveals the importance of attracting fresh women graduates to private-sector jobs as well as retaining women already in jobs for mutual gains.

The great majority of women in Oman are impacted by time-based WIF, making it difficult for them to accomplish home duties and responsibilities such as caring for their children, elderly parents, and their studies. The married, 31-40 age bracket and the uneducated are the worst impacted in this part of the Arab world. Other major strenuous challenges that emotionally drain women are strain-based interferences caused by long work hours, late arrival home, lengthier commute to work, poor employee-organization fit, or issues at home such as undesirable reliance on domestic help. These time-based and strain-based interactions necessitate a need for structural support from organizations, such as flexi working, work-life balance, quality of work life, and family-friendly policies, on the one hand, and assistance from

family members on the other (Belwal et al., 2020). Particularly, in this part of the Arab World, women must develop "adaptive tendencies" to survive the workplace, which can be effective not only in dealing with work and strain-related interferences, but also in dealing with poor people-organization fit caused by mismatches in their qualifications and labor market needs, resulting in incompatibility, frustration, stress, and job turnover Anonymous (2021). Thus the practical solutions lie in the design and implementation of appropriate policies to reduce work stress and work–family conflict and increase job satisfaction and work-life balance. Some of the measures might include reducing working hours, introducing flexi-work, raising wages, offering career guidance and counseling, providing chances for professional growth and training, and extending wholehearted support from senior management and family (Porter and Ayman, 2010; Subramaniam and Selvaratnam, 2010; Allen et al., 2013; Lott, 2020).

Theoretical Contribution

Theoretically, the study fills in the gaps between three different types of WFC and their effects on the turnover intention from an integrative view of WFC theory, role theory, and conservation of resource theory, emphasizing the importance of support from family and organization. This research is a pioneering attempt to probe WFC in detail together with some of its associative constructs such as organizational support, family support, and turnover intention. The study demonstrates the dominance of strain-based FIW on time-based WIF and strain-based WIF in influencing turnover intentions in the local cultural context. The evidence provides some support for the modernization theory, as women have begun to embrace white-collar jobs that reward education (Fatima and Sultana, 2009; Suh, 2017). However, it indicates if the rising U curve can be undermined by a threat to gaining access to resources, as women's labor-force participation affects women differently in different cultural settings, in our case the Arab world (Göksel, 2013; Fernndez, 2013; Hakan et al., 2015). Thus, the research disentangles the complex structure of theories that underpin WFC and related variables (Greenhaus and Beutell (1985)). It concurs with the conservation of resources (COR) theory, which states that facing conflict and scarcity in gaining access to resources causes stress among workers; and calls for the role of organizations, families, and societies, thus exhibiting its link with the role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Schuler, Aldag, and Brief, 1977). Besides revealing the importance of informal family support in the Arab world, it underpins the need for studying formal organizational support, by calling for the design, development, and implementation of appropriate policies to reduce work stress and work-family conflict, as well as increase work-life balance and job retention.

Limitations and direction for future research

This study has some research limitations. Reaching women who had already quit their jobs as a result of WFC proved challenging. The longitudinal impact of WFC dimensions on turnover could not be examined because the data were only collected in a single wave. We cannot completely rule out reporting biases or inhibitions on the part of our participants, even though

we interrogated them personally. Our measure of perceived turnover intentions does not necessarily imply the actual turnover. The research did not include the women working in the government sector in Oman which could have given a good basis for comparison. Future researchers can include government employees. Furthermore, they can also delve into testing the causality between these constructs for a comprehensive theory building.

Conclusions

Women's participation in the labour force of Oman is skewed significantly towards government sector jobs. Omani women are less attracted to the private sector and employers face difficulties in retaining them. This study attempted to assess the WFC of Omani women working in the private sector. The study found that time-based and strain-based work conditions, mainly in the WIF direction, affect the families of women significantly. No significant evidence of behavioural interference was found. It also appeared that almost four-fifths of the working women intend to quit their jobs whereas more than half of them are always in search of a better job. It appears that job turnover is influenced more by strain-based bi-directional WFC. Married women, particularly those having infants or school-age children, face significantly high time-based WIF and this interference is higher among those who are above 30 years. Furthermore, WFC affects lowly educated women workers more. The study found that almost half of them lack support from their organizations, particularly in the context of job security, appreciation of efforts, and caring for their opinion, goals, and values. On the contrary, a vast majority of them get enormous support from their family. The lack of organizational support imposes difficulty in their work-life and makes them unstable in their jobs. The support from their families, however, provides a big relief and enables them hooked to their jobs. The research indicates the mismatches between women's educational achievements and labour market needs or educational specialization and the nature of the job, which could be one of the plausible causes of job turnover. The research highlights a need to study the causal impact of WFC on employee commitment and turnover intent as well as a need to address the explicit lack of organizational support for women, which could be extended in the form of well-contemplated HR policies and regulations. The design and implementation of appropriate FFPs could help in achieving better workforce participation, WLB, and QWL. The structural form of organizational support in compliance with the labour laws and its awareness among women workers could play a major role not only in dealing with the WFC but also in preventing their switching to government sector jobs.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

1. Why Omani women do not want to work in the private sector?
 - Why there are only a few women? Is this because of low participation, and high turnover?
 - Nowadays it is difficult to get a job. We wonder why women leave their jobs. Can you answer this by recalling a case in your knowledge and the known reasons?
 - Why do females prefer to work in the government sector rather than the private sector?
 - Does your employer want to hire women? If not, why?
 - Is there any preference for married or unmarried women?
 - Do you see any issue with the women themselves or society that they do not want to work in the private sector? Why or why not?
2. How easy do you find it to manage your work both at home and work?
 - What challenges do you face at home that affect your working in the company?
 - What challenges do you face at your work that affect your household responsibilities?

- Do you often feel like quitting the job? Why so?
- Have you ever mentioned your problems to your employers? Formally? Informally?
- Have your employer shown any concerns about the problems you have raised?
- How cooperative do you find your family in such a situation?

3. What informal/formal workplace support (e.g., family-supportive supervisors, high levels of job autonomy, an organizational culture that supports women's career advancement) is given to women in your organization?

	Informal	Formal
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

- 1) What policies are working, and what needs revision in your opinion?
- 2) How supportive do you find the Omani Labour Law for working women having responsibilities of children and home?

4. What sorts of support you or other women will generally need to manage their work and life well?

Perceptions	Commendations	Reservations

How friendly are the policies in your organization when it comes to work-life balance?

Give an example of the policies that benefit women in your organization.

Do you feel that these FFPs are sufficient?

Perception: What else would suit your requirement at work and home?

- 3) Do you work overtime to earn some more money? Why or why not?
- 4) Do you often take your work home? What type of work and why?
- 5) What you lose or gain in comparison to other women who are not working in the industry:
Lose

Gain
- 6) Can you tell me about the company culture, and what makes it unique for the women employee?

Demographic Profile of the respondent:

- 1) Highest Educational Qualification:
- 2) Position\Designation _____
 - Operational & Technical
 - Professional
 - Supervisory & Managerial
- 3) Total Work Experience (in years) _____
- 4) Age- <25 _____ 25-30 _____ 31-40 _____ >40 _____
- 5) Nature of work: Outdoor Indoor Mixed
- 6) Personal Income: Below OMR 500 OMR 500-1000 Above OMR 1000
- 7) Organization: _____
- Job Title: _____

Table 1. Region-wise Breakdown of Sample respondents for Questionnaires

Governorates	Muscat	Al Batinah	Musandam	Adh-Dhahirah	Ad-Dakhiliyah	Ash-Sharqiyah	Dhofar	Al-Buraimi	Total
No. of women Targeted	160	180	20	40	80	100	60	20	660
No. of women covered	108	166	20	16	41	56	40	19	466

Table 2. Profile of Sample Respondents (N= 466)

Age	No.	Percent	Qualification	No	Percent
Less than 25	35	7.5	Diploma or below	247	53.0
25-30	216	46.4	Advanced Diploma	82	17.6
31-40	194	41.6	Bachelor's Degree	120	25.8
More than 40	21	4.5	Master's Degree or Ph.D.	17	3.6
Position in Organisation	Nature of Organization				
Operational	220	47.2	Manufacturing	235	50.4
Professional	26	5.6	Services	146	31.2
Managerial	219	47.0	Others	85	18.2
Marital Status	Children to manage				
Never Married	158	34	Yes	213	80
Married	294	63	No	53	20
Divorced	14	3			
Children to manage (at least one)	Status of Spouse				
Less than six month	29	11	Full-time job	231	87
Six months to one year	40	15	Part-time job	19	7
One to five years	133	50	Unemployed	11	4
More than five years	53	20	Ill or unable to work	05	2

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA-WLB Dimensions by Education

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time-based work interference with family	Between Groups	14.868	3	4.956	4.863	.002
	Within Groups	470.868	462	1.019		
	Total	485.735	465			
Time-based family interference with work	Between Groups	16.393	3	5.464	5.867	.001
	Within Groups	429.404	461	.931		
	Total	445.798	464			
Strain-based work interference with family	Between Groups	13.855	3	4.618	4.705	.003
	Within Groups	453.526	462	.982		
	Total	467.381	465			
Strain-based family interference with work	Between Groups	28.724	3	9.575	7.994	.000
	Within Groups	550.955	460	1.198		
	Total	579.679	463			
Behavior-based work interference with family	Between Groups	24.916	3	8.305	7.368	.000
	Within Groups	518.514	460	1.127		
	Total	543.429	463			
Behavior-based family interference with work	Between Groups	19.640	3	6.547	5.474	.001
	Within Groups	550.187	460	1.196		
	Total	569.828	463			

Table 4. Mean Scores WFC Dimensions

Education		Time-based work interference with family	Time-based family interference with work	Strain-based work interference with family	Strain-based family interference with work	Behavior- based work interference with family	Behavior- based family interference with work
Diploma or below	Mean	2.07	3.04	1.94	2.81	2.84	2.80
	N	247.00	246.00	247.00	245.00	245.00	245.00
	SD	1.00	1.04	1.00	1.16	1.19	1.23
Advanced Diploma	Mean	2.33	3.22	2.19	3.32	3.26	3.16
	N	82.00	82.00	82.00	82.00	82.00	82.00
	SD	1.03	0.93	0.97	1.05	1.04	1.01
Bachelor's Degree	Mean	2.44	3.47	2.29	3.30	3.23	3.22
	N	120.00	120.00	120.00	120.00	120.00	120.00
	SD	0.97	0.81	0.98	0.97	0.81	0.82
Master's Degree or PhD	Mean	2.63	3.51	2.49	3.31	3.64	3.27
	N	17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00
	SD	1.25	1.05	1.09	1.09	0.79	1.17
Total	Mean	2.23	3.20	2.10	3.05	3.04	2.99
	N	466.00	465.00	466.00	464.00	464.00	464.00
	SD	1.02	0.98	1.00	1.12	1.08	1.11

Table 5. The Correlation of different WFC dimensions with Turnover Intention

	Time-based work interference with family	Time-based family interference with work	Strain- based work interference with family	Strain- based family interference with work	Behavior- based work interference with family	Behavior- based family interference with work	Turnover Intention
Cronbach's Alpha	0.836	0.659	0.803	0.78	0.717	0.813	0.764
No. of items	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Correlation with Turnover Intension	0.213 **	.155 **	.285**	.260**	.168**	.165**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

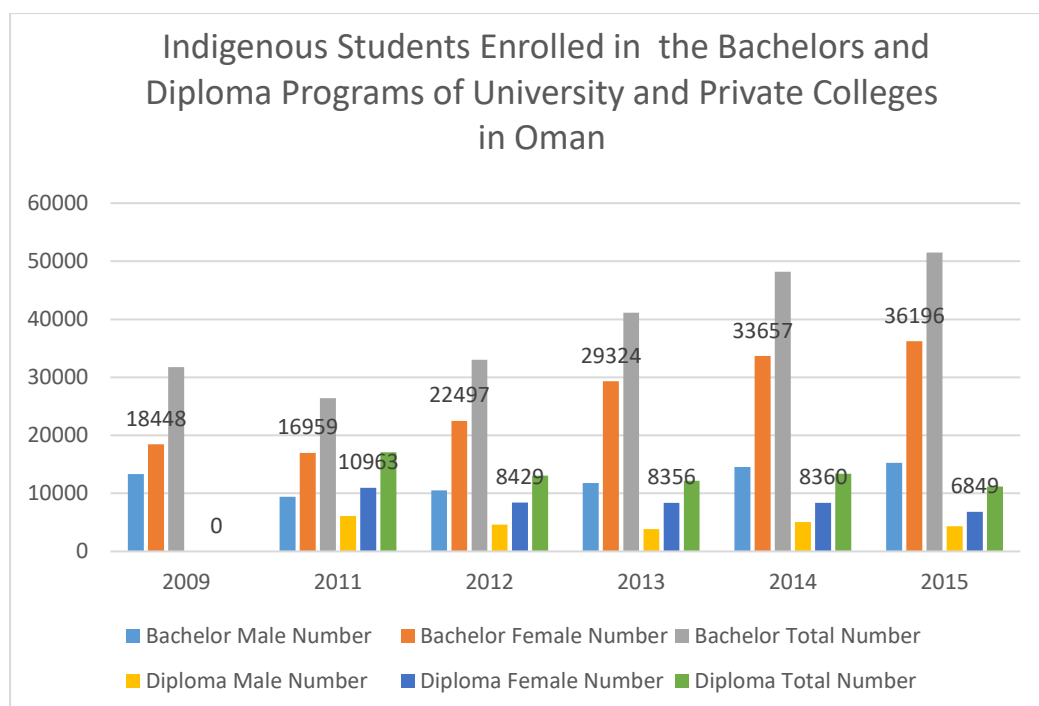
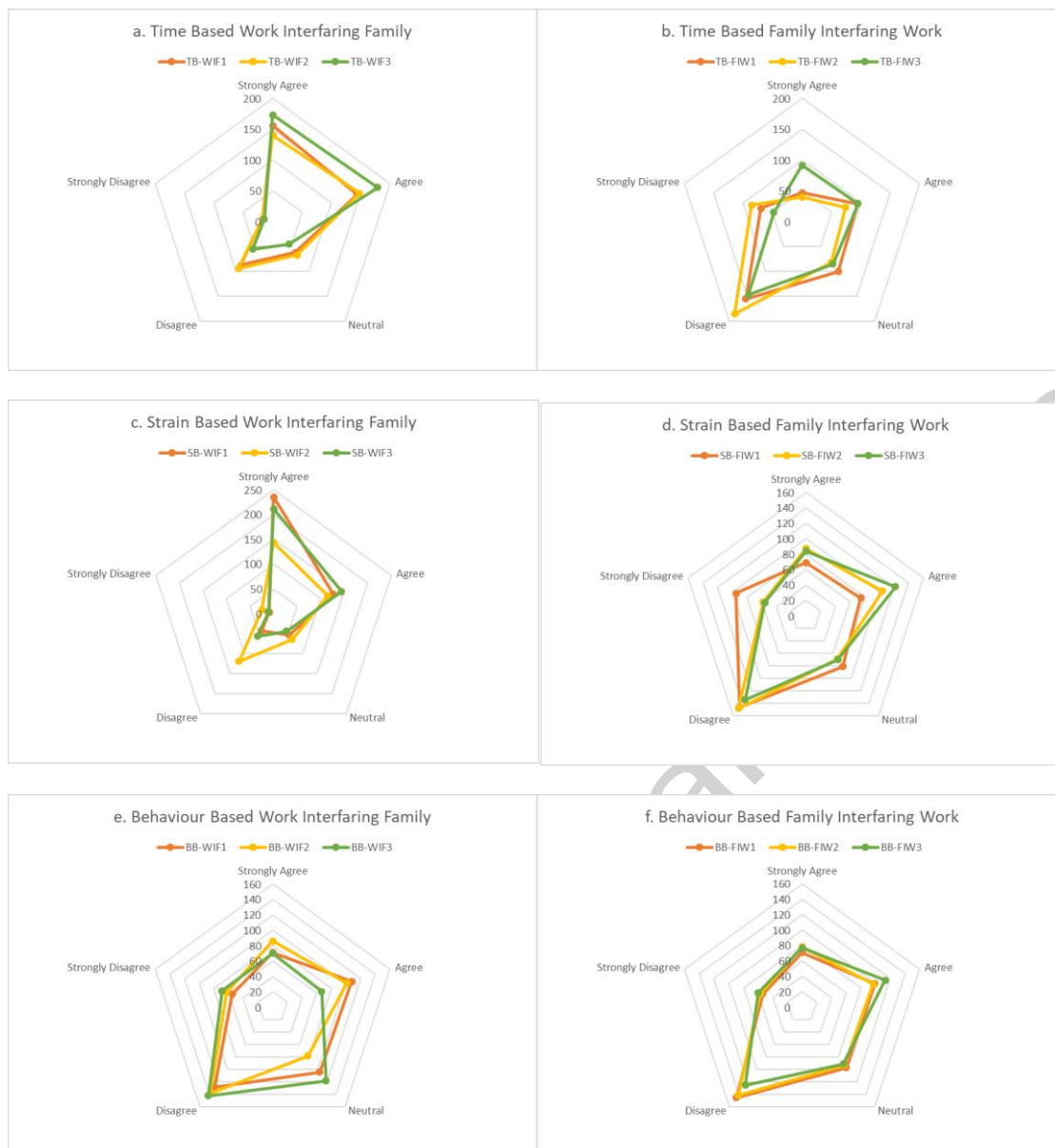


Figure 1. Indigenous Students Enrolled in the Bachelors and Diploma Programs of University and Private Colleges in Oman

Source: (Generated using <https://data.gov.om/OMEDCT2016/education>)



TB-WIF1	My work keeps me from my family activities more than I would like
TB-WIF2	The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities
TB-WIF3	I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work.
TB-FIW1	The time I spend on family responsibilities often interfere with my work responsibilities
TB-FIW2	The time I spend with my family often causes me not to spend time on activities at work helpful to my career.
TB-FIW3	I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities
SB-WIF1	When I get home from work, I am often too frazzled to participate in family activities and responsibilities.
SB-WIF2	I am often so emotionally drained when I get home that it prevents me from contributing to my family
SB-WIF3	Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I get home I am too stressed to do things I enjoy.
SB-FIW1	Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work
SB-FIW2	Because I am often stressed from family responsibilities, I have a hard time concentrating on my work
SB-FIW3	Tension and anxiety in family life often weaken my ability to do my job.
BB-WIF1	The problem-solving behaviours I use in my job are not effective in resolving problems at home.
BB-WIF2	Behaviour that is effective and necessary for me at work would be counterproductive at home.
BB-WIF3	The behaviours I perform that make me effective at work do not help me to be a better parent.
BB-FIW1	The behaviours that work for me at home do not seem to be effective at work.
BB-FIW2	Behaviour that is necessary and effective for me at home would be counterproductive at work.
BB-FIW3	The problem-solving behaviour that works for me at home does not seem to be as useful at work.

Figure 2. An Assessment of Different Dimensions of WLB Challenges

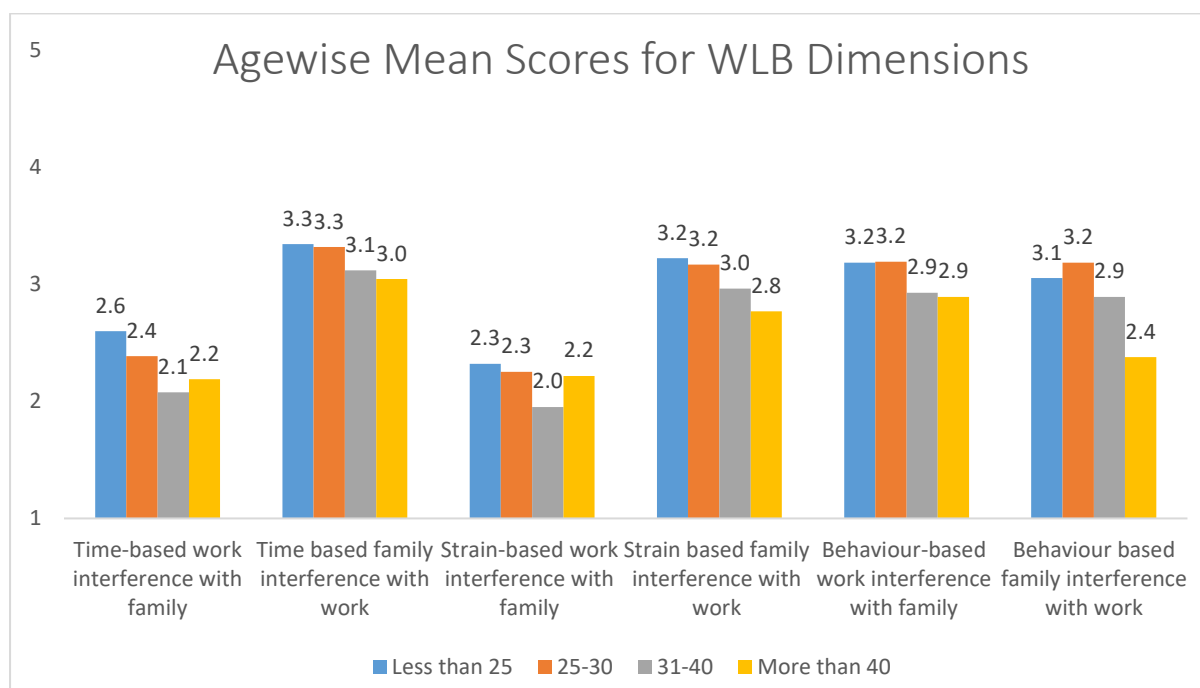


Figure 3. Age-wise Mean Scores for WLB Dimensions
(With agreement levels on Y-axis where 1 = Strongly Agree, 3= Neutral, 5 = Strongly Disagree)



Figure 4. A comparison of organisational support and family support received by Women