A Qualitative Exploratory Study of Work-from-Home as a Workable Strategy for Female Participation in Labor Force from a Conventional Culture

Sadia Khan and Kanza Faisal

University of the Punjab

Attiya Khan

University of the Lahore

COVID-19 changed the world completely in terms of economics. Everyone experienced work from home during the pandemic. All sorts of workforce revolutionized and found ways to effectively shift online. Considering the socially fixed gender roles for females embedded strongly in our patriarchal culture, the present study focused on exploring if work from home was a workable strategy for female participation in labor force. A qualitative exploratory research design was used to collect data from ($N = 8$) Females, mean age ($M = 32$) years from various work sectors. Data was collected through criterion sampling over a Zoom meeting via a focused group discussion. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data. Data was categorized into three main themes: 1. Female social identities in cultural context, 2. Benefits and costs of female labor force participation and 3. Advantages, disadvantages and possible solutions for work-from-home. This study explored an experience-based evaluation of WFH strategy as a viable option for female financial empowerment in a conventional culture like Pakistan from stakeholders' (female) perspective. This can create opportunities on industrial level, generate avenues for more research into role of females in industry and economy and can help in encouraging women become more financially stable and

Sadia Khan and Kanza Faisal, Institute of Applied Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Sadia Khan, School of Professional Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

Attiya Khan, School of integrated Social Sciences, University of the Lahore, Pakistan.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sadia Khan, School of Professional Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: s.khan20041990@gmail.com

help increase country's economy leading to increased female employability and labor force participation.

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Pakistan is the world's 5th most populous country with a population of over 216.6 million people. Out of these, 48.54% are females (World Bank, as cited in Jabeen, 2021). The female labor force participation (FLFP) is only 9.4%. In a survey conducted across an urban city of Pakistan, Peshawar, KPK, the reasons identified for such low female participation in workforce were: low education levels, lack of knowledge regarding work opportunities, financial constraints, concerns for safety and honor, fear of sexual harassment at work, feared resistance from family and neighborhood, deeply rooted attitudes towards gender inequality, lack of freedom to decide which jobs one could pursue, and the lack of knowledge on job market functioning. According to this survey, if only the information regarding the prospects of employment were disseminated then the female labor force participation could increase by 7% (Redaelli & Rahman, 2021).

Due to COVID-19, pandemic, the entire world by force had to experience working from home. Some liked it others found it very difficult. Nevertheless, for the safety of all, a new work module was introduced, and it not only became acceptable but widely popular. People in Pakistan, due to locked downs, also worked from home. Social acceptance of work from home increased. Many females took this opportunity as a blessing and as a way forward started working or providing services from home. Since female participation in workforce in Pakistan is extremely low, therefore, the present study aimed to investigate if work from home (WFH) was a viable employment strategy for females in Pakistan keeping in consideration our socio-cultural beliefs and norms.

Work from home (WFH) is a phenomenon in the economic sector entails a person doing their designated work from the setting of their homes instead of an office or employment place. While WFH has been in practice since the 1990's on experimental levels, the event of COVID-19 made everyone in the workforce experience it by force. Social isolation for more than 2 years lead to major industries from education, politics, business to healthcare and almost every other field to perform their professional activities online. Neiman (2020) conducted a survey in UN and other countries where they divided various jobs into major sectors with relevance to the ones that could be successfully performed from the comfort of a home. The top few

jobs performed with efficacy were in education, business, management, and social science sectors.

Historically, during a recession in 2008, it was observed that job losses for males were much higher than for females. A reason for that could be that relatively more men worked in industries that were adversely affected by a 'standard' downturn like manufacturing or construction companies. Women on the other hand, worked more in sectors like healthcare and education. Even during the current crisis of COVID-19, a big impact on service occupations was seen as a high number of females were employed in sectors like restaurants and hospitality. It has been identified that gender inequality in the labor market is related to an unequal division of labor in the household. Even though the female labor force participation (FLFP) is now close to or almost equal to that of males in most industrialized countries, women are still doing more housework such as cooking and cleaning and childcare than their male partners (Alon et al., 2020). In a recent report, it was found that while 46% of males have been concentrated in sectors like 'Manufacturing', 'Construction', and 'Trade, Transportation, Utilities', females in such sectors are only about 24%. Likewise, concentration of females in less cyclic sectors like 'Government' and 'Education and Health Services' are much more than males, almost 2:1, 40% females versus 20% males. However, some women have chosen to work in countercyclical sectors to compensate for their husbands' cyclical employment risk (Coskun & Dalgic, 2020). Similarly, in a study on Pakistani population, it was found that 12% of the urban jobs and 9% of rural jobs could be done from home. Megacities were considerably different from urban and rural regions in terms of work-from-home options. Top female occupations, health and education, had more work-from home options than the top male occupations (Hasan et al., 2021). In conclusion, there is an uneven concentration of gender in the work sectors.

A study focused on explaining what made females engage in economic activities identified factors like technological advancements, decreased fertility rate, narrowing gaps between gender inequality, increasing household income and structural changes in living standards. All these factors showed that an increase in the share of income controlled by women benefitted children. Despite the fact that an increase in female education contributed to higher economic growth, it still did not translate into better labor market outcomes. Women despite working full time jobs had to work more at home with all the household chores. Furthermore, women had less access to formal financial institutions and saving mechanisms (Awan & Sadia, 2018). In Pakistan and other developing countries like Afghanistan,

Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan, a lack of female involvement in daily businesses has been a significant issue. Female involvement in Central Asian countries compared to that in Pakistan has been double. Female involvement in any economic activity is determined by the interplay of two forces: Demand and supply. Hence, female labor force participation (FLFP) has been influenced by wages, inflation, unemployment, interest rates, the state's politics, and other economic factors (Afridi, et al., 2021). Considering the current geo-political factors and the socio-economic conditions in Pakistan, it is of great concern that after investing time, money and effort into their education and training the females are not using their knowledge and skills. One culturally relevant factor that impedes this is the religious-cultural factor pertaining to gender based roles.

Religious norms have often been promoting maternal instincts and values amongst women which have often been seen as setting restrictive values for females in workforce (Wong, 2012). Women often have to forgo paid employment because of their over-involvement with unpaid household responsibilities. It has been believed that often women internalize religious values in terms of restrictions upon themselves and defend their choices which in actuality restrict their well-being (Gender beliefs based on partriracial structure is a limiting factor in females trying to make their professional identities (Mousa et al., 2023). Considering the milieu of factors that effect a female decision to choose between being a "home maker vs professional", the choice of "working" from "home" needs to be studied as a considerable option.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to shift to remote working to reduce the spread of the disease (Rashid & Faisal, 2020). From the employees' perspective, work from home came with challenges. The boundary between work and home got blurred, staying focused on job required more effort and resulted in higher anxiety and fatigue. Furthermore, psychological detachment from home was deemed necessary to mitigate the influence on daily work engagement and enacted incivility (Verma & Uy, 2021).

Based on the existing view of female participation in workforce in Pakistan, the aim of the present research was to understand if working from home was a good option for increasing female participation in the workforce?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

For current study, female gender was studied under the context of socio-cultural perspective. The ontological assumption (the nature of reality under investigation) for the study was how females experienced

different identities in social context? The epistemological assumption (understanding and explaining knowledge) was made through a constructivist paradigm which postulated that 'every person is an active agent in creating their own reality through active interaction within environmental context'. Under constructivism the work from home experiences of women were drawn upon to understand how females of Pakistan navigated their gender identities within various social contexts? How these identities affected their professional lives? Social constructivists proposed that gender roles of feminine vs. masculine behavior were based on social practices which were created and legitimized by culture and religion. Pakistan being a Muslim country embedded in patriarchal ideology both at religious and cultural levels has very strict gender roles. Based on these roles the segregation of males and females in various social and economic sectors has created certain issues for females. Navigating such issues in rapidly changing cultures effected by digitalization and globalization in the 21st century during COVID-19 crisis needed more in-depth investigation. The idea of "working/ professional woman" in a developing country like Pakistan is still under construction. Understanding that change through drawing in the experiences of the women who are active agents in cultivation, modifying and redefining this, will lead to more culturally acceptable understanding of what women empowerment and gender equality presently looked like.

Research Questions

Main question: Can 'work from home' be an effective strategy for female labor force participation (FLFP) in Pakistan?

1. What are the socio-cultural gender roles expected of females as they enter the workforce?
2. What are some of the costs and benefits of female labor force participation in Pakistan?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home for females in Pakistan?

Method

Research Design

A qualitative exploratory research design was used to investigate in-depth experiences of females with work from home.

Study Sample

A brief description about the purpose and criteria of the study was shared on a Facebook social group for females. Women who showed interest and were available to be a part of the study were then approached and screened for eligibility. Using criterion based sampling technique N=8 participants were recruited for the study.. For current study the "Focus group" was considered a more viable data collection strategy because it was believed that the participants diversity in work sector will enable them to share and discuss their experiences in a group discussion. The interactive features of focus group discussions allows room for diversity and verification of opinions leading to a more enriched sharing of experiences (Smithson, 2000) The ontological and epistemological assumptions undertaken in current study required shared discussion of experience of the group (Females who worked from home during Covid-19) rather than an individualistic one, and the focus group allows for it.

Inclusion Criteria

The criteria for focus group were decided as:

- Females having professional education, at least a bachelor's degree.
- Females having experienced work from home for at least 6 months.
- Females aged between 22-45 years.
- Work experience of at least 2 years in any job industry.

Sample Characteristics

Participants of the study were inclusive of females who initially worked full-time at offices but were forced to work from home during COVID-19. Females preferring to continue work from home despite the condition of work from home being lifted. Females who had not worked before but started to do so after seeing work from home as a viable option during COVID-19. Females who had no choice but to work from home during COVID-19 crisis as a means to make ends meet due to unexpected financial crisis.

Table 1: *Characteristics of Study Population for Focused Group*

Sr #	Participant ID (Pseudonyms)	Age	Education	Work sector
1	Kashmala	30	M.Phil.	Education
2	Hafza	28	Ph.D.	Education
3	Mahrukh	31	M.B.B.S	Medicine
4	Dua	33	B.Sc.	Digital Media Marketing
5	Sadaf	30	MBA	Human Resource
6	Fareeha	29	MS	Social Worker
7	Nisha	32	MSc	Freelancer
8	Jawaria	34	BSc	Bakery business

Note. To establish and maintain anonymity and confidentiality of information, each participant was given an assumed name. These pseudonyms have been used only to represent the data, keeping discreet the real identities of the research participants.

Research Process

Focused Group Discussion

A focused group discussion with $N = 8$ females was held online via Zoom meeting asking for each participant's opinions on the research questions.

Time and Location of the Study. Participants were informed of the study and its purpose two weeks before the discussion. An online Zoom meeting was set for research purpose where the participants were invited on the decided date and time. Protocol on how a focus group works was briefed to all the participants in advance to avoid interruptions in between sessions and include opinion from all participants.

Moderator/Facilitator. Out of the 3 researchers, first author acted as the main conductor of focus group (informing the participants the rules of the focus group, asking questions and delegating the discussion), second author played the art of moderator (facilitating every participant so that their voices were heard, jotting down main points of discussion as memos and audit trail), and the third author acted as a facilitator (recording the whole discussion).

Data Recording. Permission to record the session was individually sought well before time from each participant willing to be a part of the research. The Zoom meeting was recorded and saved in cloud for further transcription and analysis.

Data Analyses

The data from focused group discussions was transcribed and a deductive approach to thematic analysis was used. The data was categorized under pre-determined themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017) to formulate results. The 6-step process of thematic analysis used was as follow:

1. The researchers developed data familiarization via reading and re-reading of transcripts until all participant views created a cohesive understanding.

2. Preliminary codes were assigned by two researchers separately. Two coders coded the data and matched the codes for similarities and differences to increase credibility of research and to safeguard against personal/female/researcher bias (Noble & Smith, 2015).

3. Recurring patterns/themes were searched in accordance with research questions across the different views given by participants in both data groups.

4. The codes and themes were reviewed by the third researcher in a blind review.

5. After reviewing the themes were named and defined. After reconciliation and cross verification, a summary table of major themes, subthemes, and relevant codes from participant discussions were drawn as shown in Table 2.

6. Member-checking was done by approaching two research participants from each data group (focus group and one on one interview group) to get feedback on final themes and subthemes to ensure that the meaning of the content was not lost during analysis. In discussion section, the themes were discussed by emphasizing participants' verbatim to maintain researcher's neutrality and to provide more voice to their views and opinions.

Ethical Considerations

APA ethics of research were followed where necessary. Consent of participants was taken explaining the nature and purpose of the study prior to data collection. Participants were ensured of their rights: willingness to participate, anonymity, confidentiality of data, withdrawal and right to ask questions regarding the research.

Results

Table 2: *Tabulated Representation of Frequency, Codes, Subthemes and Major Themes*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Frequency
Female social identities in cultural context	Mother	Childbearing (pregnancy)/ maternity leave issues in job	8
		Child rearing (looking after children as the main job of a female)	8
	Wife	Looking after husband and his needs (he has to allow for job, job cannot be in anyplace other than where husband lives, problems if job is better in position or pay)	3
		Looking after husbands' family (work-family life conflict, in case husband is absent than in-laws must give permission for job)	3
	Daughter/ daughter in law	Good daughter/daughter in law looks after her family/her in laws	6
		Responsible for developing and maintain social relations within the family (priorities needs of family over job commitments)	8
		Unpaid labor in the form of cooking, cleaning, washing etc.	8
	Woman	No self-identity (identity mostly linked with other social relations)	5
		Educational freedom for most but Marriage vs Career (either or option)	8

Continued…

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Frequency
		Job/career is contingent upon husband and in-laws' values	4
		In case of divorce or single/spinsterhood, job is priority (self-reliance)	7
	Working woman	Discrimination during recruitment	5
		Workplace Harassment	3
		Hard to progress professionally in male dominated field	5
Benefits	At personal level	Self-reliance	6
		Greater self esteem	8
	At economic level	More financial independence	8
		Effective ROI on use of educational resources utilized for getting education, time invested, and effort put	7
		Increase in country GDP (playing a role in reducing poverty)	7
	At social/cultural level	Better mothers (provide financial security for children, husband, family and self)	7
		More global awareness	5
		Gender equality	5
Costs	At personal level	Guilt over not giving quality time to children/husband/family	7
		Subconscious label of Bad mother/wife/daughter in law	5
		Lower productivity, self-esteem and confidence	5
	At economic level	Financial dependence	7

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Frequency
		Waste of educational resource, time and effort	3
		More mouths to feed than earning hands	4
	At social/cultural level	In case of divorce or financial crises for husband they became liability for men which leads to more cases of abuse	8
		Less social awareness because their social circle is restricted to home	5
Advantages	Work related benefits	Time and cost effective in terms of money and time invested in going to work and back from work	8
	Personal benefits	Family life becomes more secure in terms of looking after children	7
		Less hectic life	8
		Less guilt over children, husband, family	7
Disadvantages	Work related cost	Less productivity	6
		Imbalance in work and life continuum	6
		Guilt and stress related to work output	6
		Work procrastination	6
	Personal cost	Work-family conflict leading to stress Loss of identity as a working woman-more equal to stay at home mother	7
Solutions	Experience based	Fixed work hours	7
		Separation of workspace and hours from family setting	8

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Frequency
		Developing a boundary between work related and family identities via space and time	8
		Support form spouse in managing children	6

Discussion

Experiences and views of females in the context of gender roles, cost benefit analysis of female labor force participation and work from home have been discussed below. Major themes have been discussed in cultural, social and personal context through quoting the supporting excerpts from participant discussions giving voice to their opinions. Pseudonyms have been used to represent participants to maintain research integrity and ethical considerations.

Theme 1: Female Social Identities in Cultural Context

Culturally acceptable social norms have been the backbone of any gender role. Universally the gender roles of females and males are predetermined and have generalizability. With males being the main bread earner and females as child bearer and home makers. The 21st century brought about a change in gender roles where the females also played a larger role in generating economical values. Developing countries like Pakistan with century old traditions embedded in religion and culture are slow to adapt to such changes. In this context the roles of females and males are still very much inflexible. Despite the high rate of education in females, most of them don't utilize their skills to gain any monetary value out of it. The main reason behind this was discussed by all the participants as a conflict of their roles and responsibilities of their gender identities and social expectations of it. The main idea was of what makes a particular identity good vs bad. These identities were divided into four major categories as mother, wife, and daughter/daughter in law and woman with relevance to frequency of appearance in interviews and relative importance in terms of how it effects the employment status of a woman in Pakistan. The biggest problem for any working woman in Pakistan is the identity of 'mother'. With mothers having the sole responsibility of taking care of children and raising them, the clash of this identity with the identity of a "working woman" is so bi-directional that it becomes

an either/or question for a woman. She can either be a good mom or a god working woman. As Kashmala said:

> *Before I had my first born, I used to think that I could manage both work and motherhood but the moment I became a mother I realized that my life had entirely changed. I had to choose between my financial independence and the future of my child.*

Another participant, Hafza, viewed this as:

> *What I didn't understand was why it seemed like a difficult choice, I had fixed working hours, could use my earning to get help for my child, my husband's family could take care of my child because it was their blood as well. Despite having all these options, one thing was clear to me that the subtle but ever-present opinions of others on how a mother should be, how she must care for her child, and an absent mother's child being poorly brought up etc. were always going to be there instilling guilt in a mother and limiting her personal life choices.*

Dua made an interesting observation:

> *In case of applying for any job there is an interview question regarding the status of a woman which is usually are you married? If you say yes than are you in family way or are you planning for it? Now from the employer's perspective I guess employing a woman who is married or pregnant becomes a liability because the job of a woman is linked to the area of residence of her husband and if she is pregnant then she will need maternity leave and sick leaves in case her health deteriorates due to pregnancy. So, in terms of time and resources, the institution putting in time and training with a female employee becomes a burden. Whereas, for males they don't have such concerns. In such cases, to secure a job, females often either lie or tell half-truth.*

This point indicates the identity of wife and mother are deciding factors in employment status of women. The role of family support in sustainable employment of a female is very important, without this the stress of family life and work life can lead to several health issues. Mahrukh mentioned:

At home, I'm a mother and a wife and a daughter-in-law. All these titles mean I have different roles and responsibilities towards different people. It's like I have to divide myself into several people. Once, I remember even laughing to myself on not remembering anyone in the family calling me by my name, as if the person with my name didn't ever exist. It would always be 'mom' this, 'begum' that, "bahu' whatever. Every time I would hear those words, my body would automatically adopt that role. At work, people used to call me by my name and called me "madam" and that strangely made me feel like I existed and had some value.

In another view, Nisha said,

"No one cares if you earn as long as you fulfill other obligations".

Jawaria added,

"We are home makers, wives, mothers and basic building blocks of any relationship. It will take some time over a few more generations for a female to develop this identity and have the same perks of identity as a male".

Sadaf said:

In our culture, women's age to marry has a bracket to it after which it is thought that they are too old or if still single, then there is something wrong with them. Most females are wedded off before they are 25 years old. Right after marriage, the pressure to conceive a baby begins. Most of the times females do so to prove to the families that they are fertile. All these social pressures, takes over their ambitions, setting them about 7-10 years back in their career growth.

An educator, Dua, observed that

"Sometimes we see young women passionate to pursue their education or jobs bringing their children with them. You'd never see a man bringing his children to work or any given setting".

Another educator, Hafza said:

> *In our culture, females have the luxury to not have to earn. Despite high rate of literacy, most won't get any job and happily get married but the downside of it is that certain cultural values are being changed for the worse. Now females are expected to earn and support family financially along with managing all the typical household chores.*

Fareeha added to this

> *"The idea of "doctor bahu" is one of the most toxic cultural developments. Everyone wants a very highly educated daughter-in-law and wife but all the efforts in terms of money and time becomes zero as she'd be expected to work-at-home."*

The feminine vs masculine rhetoric is as old as time. The segregation of sexes based on expected roles is embedded in socio-cultural schemas. In the past over world wars, famine and many other natural or manmade disasters where ratio of male vs female became unstable, both genders took roles of each gender in order to survive. Similarly during the Covid-19 and resultant lock down, diluted these roles to an extend where a lot of questions arose regarding their validity. Vollmann et al. (2023) in a recent research observed that females across various cultures faced more backlashes due to this masculine vs feminine narrative because it is more restrictive for females than the males when it comes to being professional. As a result females reported being more stressed, more disoriented regarding their identities and less hopeful for future.

Theme 2: Benefits and Costs of Female Labor Force Participation

The experiences and views of participants were analyzed at personal, economic and socio-cultural levels in terms of costs/negative points and benefits/positive points of female employment in Pakistan. Factors that were highlighted in terms of personal costs were guilt over not giving quality time to children/husband/family leading to subconscious label of being a bad mother/wife/daughter-in-law and resulting in lower productivity, self-esteem and confidence.

One participant, Fareeha said:

> *When you are absent half of the day because the average working hours of any job varies between 8 am-5 pm, this means you are absent for more than*

half of the day from your home, your children and your family. In your absence there needs to be someone who will look after the need of your family and if not then you feel guilty. Especially if your child is too young, sick or injured. Children need their mothers but being employed means you have double the responsibilities now. The guilt sometimes eats you. You feel like you are not doing enough.

Two participants Nisha and Jawaria both agreed that

"By working and earning for oneself, one feels like all the effort that they put into their education, the sleepless nights before exams or major assignments and presentations, the tough morning routine during summers have paid off".

Dua added,

'Due to current high rates of economic downturns, divorce rates, daily expenses are enough to make anyone stressed. Having two earnings than one is a shared burden and responsibility. Less stressful that way."

Fareeha linked this with COVID-19 situation,

'I can take care of myself in terms of economics, that's less burden on my husband. We both work as a team with shared resources to build a better future for our kids."

Talking about a larger perspective, Kashmala said,

"High divorce rates and low earning of males is pushing females into financial crisis where they are considered liabilities. We need more females in workforce. Earning is empowering making you a functional member of the society instead of a burden".

At home, in society, in economy and in general betterment of your country's GDP. Being more than half of country's population, women cannot be reliant on others to look after them for life. In case of divorce or financial crises for husband they became liability for men which leads to more cases of abuse, and they have less social awareness because their social circle is restricted to home.

Gender roles assumed by women based on their culture influence how they think for themselves. Women are generally believed to be responsible for family care, imposing barriers on their own careers to

dedicate time for family and define which jobs they can access or are expected to prefer at personal levels (Klasen, 2019). Females lower career ambitions and the hardship of reconciling family and work duties puts them under a lot of pressure. The division of responsibility for household chores and family tasks become a key determinant in female career development, as the female executives in our sample demonstrated at an interactional level. Finally, the hospitality sector's conception of a woman's role is old-fashioned and behavior, attitudes or positions that do not comply with this conception are deprecated. This leads to stereotyped jobs and vertical segregation at institutional level (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

Theme 3: Advantages, Disadvantages and Possible Solutions for Work-From-Home

One of the benefits highlighted of working from home was saving time and money in travel expenses. Sadaf said:

> *Because I'm a working mom, I have to wake up way before than anyone. Cook for my family and then get ready for my job. This shortens my day by hours. Most of my time is invested in completing my family responsibilities, travelling to and from work and then again family responsibilities. At night I would go to be exhausted and stressed for the next day. During COVID-19, I felt a difference. I wasn't short on time. I slept better and did all the work at my own pace. I also saved money on travel by not having to take Uber rides.*

Another participant, Jawaria, gave a counterpoint:

> *Yes, you feel less stressed and are able to give more time to family life but if you are observant enough than you will see your work-related productivity going down very fast. Meeting deadlines and completing tasks becomes harder because family life takes energy and effort, and you develop a habit of procrastinating on work. Which leads to bad reviews from customers or employers.*

Mahrukh shared,

> *"Because of extra household duties, during COVID-19 work from home, I was unable to balance between work and family life. I started developing psychological issues like stress, related to work output.*

For me keeping my work identity intact was important"

The above statements and arguments showed that the females had diverse experiences of working from home. Their views on benefits and costs of working from home revolved around family time, identity confusion and psychological outcomes.

Drawing on their experience of working from home before and after the COVID-19 lockdown. The participants in general advised some solutions. Kashmala said,

"One must have fixed work hours depending upon your household duties. You can either work at night when everyone's asleep, or early in the morning before all wake up to accomplish work-related tasks without any distractions or disturbances". Fareeha added, *"At job your workplace is different than your home so it's easier to be in the right mindset and focus on work. Dual duties make you more stressed and less productive. Multi-tasking at work is not for me".*

Hafza commented that

"Finding uninterrupted space for work at home was the key to success. This is the only way you can create a mental shift between work and home".

Nisha suggested,

"It helps in getting yourself focused when all your material is in one place. Keep children and other family out of that. Creating such boundaries are hard at first but eventually have more benefits".

In these suggestions one factor that was emphasized was the support from spouse. Like Fareeha said,

"For a young married Pakistani working female, having an understanding and supporting spouse is very important. If your husband doesn't support your career goals, then it is always going to be stressful for the family."

Professional success is not associated with a female image despite the recent tendency for the mass media to construct an image of a successful career lady. However, such an image is always coupled with an unhappy private life and is quite masculine. Such a situation complicates the process of identifying with an image of 'a business lady'. The characteristics described above are stereotypical and

socially constructed; they reflect social assumptions about male and female traits, sex role behaviour patterns in various spheres of social life and are constantly maintained because people try to adhere to them.

Implications of the Study

The current study is an effort to highlight certain areas of concerns regarding female employment in Pakistan in cultural and gender roles. In retrospect the work from home phenomenon has mixed views in literature but in the context of this research it can be viable option for females because it integrates the traditional gender identity roles of a female in balance with the socio-economic requirements of financial stability and role females plat in the Sustainable Development Goals of a country. Future studies are needed to empirically test this idea but the provided theoretical framework will put a lot of aspects at personal, social and economic level in focus.

Conclusion

The present study focused on female labor force participation, gender role identities, work from home and their effect on female employment status in Pakistan. If female identity is of a person who stays at home, takes care of children and family and invests a larger portion of her time in family relationships in home setting. Work from home is conceptualized as doing gainful employment from your home based on the tasks proved by your employer in a professional manner than females of Pakistan can establish their roles as professional/ working woman from the comfort of their homes by developing a scheduled work hours and space. This will help them maintain financial independence in terms of self-care, helping their families and being more productive and present decision makers in society in general while maintaining their social identities as mothers, wives, daughters and women.

Suggestions

Based on the proposed analysis of female social gender roles, employment and work from home and intersecting factors at personal, social and economic level, it is suggested that the efficacy of work from home as viable option to increase female employability and

empowerment, empirical investigations studying cause and effect relationship between female empowerment and work from home and mediating/moderating effects of gender roles and social identities in work from home phenomenon are conducted at cultural/indigenous level.

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