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## **A Qualitative Exploration of the Challenges Faced by Working Women in Balancing Career and Family Roles**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the lived experiences of working women in District Mansehra, Pakistan, focusing on their challenges in balancing career and family responsibilities. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. A total of 20 Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation across professions, marital statuses, and family structures. Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis model was employed to analyze the data, revealing four key themes: time management struggles, workplace gender biases, societal expectations, and coping strategies. Findings indicate that participants faced chronic time constraints due to the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities, leading to exhaustion and stress. Workplace gender biases, including unequal promotion opportunities and inadequate maternity policies, further hindered career progression. Societal expectations and family pressures reinforced traditional gender roles, often compelling women to deprioritize their careers. Despite these challenges, participants adopted various coping strategies, such as spousal support, task delegation, and self-care, to manage their dual roles effectively. The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and interviews were conducted with sensitivity to prevent psychological distress.

**Keywords:** Household Duties, Working Mothers, Gender Role, Career, Qualitative Analysis

### **Introduction**

The workforce entrance of women in the last few decades has boosted economic development and generated meaningful social advancement. Working women encountered multiple obstacles while they attempt to balance their family duties and professional commitments despite recent workplace progress (Ali et al., 2022). Working women face simultaneous pressure from traditional caregiving responsibilities alongside their career work demands which results in job-related stress and exhaustion together with conflicts between career and family. The investigation assesses the various obstacles which working women must address during their pursuit of career development alongside home life responsibilities (Behera et al., 2024).



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Working women struggle with the continuing female role expectations which require them to carry most of the household duties. The cultural expectation in numerous social settings requires women to do home duties and child care responsibilities together with financial family support while working full-time jobs (Bhaumik & Sahu, 2025). The expectation creates more work and emotional strain which hinders working mothers from achieving work-life balance. The workplace structures together with policies fail to provide necessary support for working mothers which intensifies their challenges (Bocanegra & Granados, 2025).

Working mothers face major challenges because organizations provide few flexible work options including distant work possibilities as well as insufficient childcare assistance and parental leave benefits. Most organizations maintain strict working times which fail to account for working women's dual roles so they must decide between professional advancement and caring for their family. Working women experience further challenges because of insufficient workplace support programs that would provide affordable childcare services and family-friendly work policies (Boo, 2025).

Women working outside the house encounter career stagnation because of the discriminatory practices and biases which exist within workplaces. The belief of employers that working mothers are less committed to their work slows down their professional development and prevents them from advancing to higher positions. The acceptance of 'motherhood penalty' as a term helps maintain gender inequities that block women from advancing in their careers as well as securing financial stability (Deshpande & Kabear, 2024).

### **Problem of statement**

The workforce decision by women has grown nationally while working women in Mansehra face ongoing challenges in managing their employment duties and home obligations. Traditional gender-based roles cause women to carry most family care responsibilities thus creating stress while dealing with fatigue and minimizing work-family integration. Office policies do not support workers' needs because they maintain strict working hours and short leave periods and insufficient child care programs that create difficulty in achieving work-life balance. Employers along with society too frequently view women as not fully committed to work because they take care of family responsibilities which thwarts their career advancement. Flexible work arrangements together with institutional support shortages compound existing challenges thus restricting many women from advancing professionally along with obtaining financial independence. Various obstacles affecting gender equality in the labor force prevent individuals from thriving additionally they generate wider participant and leadership disparities between genders.

### **Research Objectives**

To examine the challenges working women face in balancing careers and family.

To assess the impact of workplace policies and societal expectations on work-life balance.

To explore strategies for fostering a supportive work environment for women.

### **Literature Review**

The research section presents an extensive evaluation of previously published literature which pertains to the selected study. The section analyzes previous research in addition to theoretical frameworks to advance comprehension of the research subject. The



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research review examines major scholarly discussions alongside literature gaps as well as significant contributions within the field. The research foundation builds through past study critical analysis which demonstrates academic value and its position among academic works.

### **Gender Roles and Work-Life Balance**

Traditional cultural roles since ancient times established household work distributions by giving most household duties to women. Women working outside the home continue to perform most family responsibilities when they get home due to the phenomenon known as the "second shift." The double responsibility produces both occupational burden and mental health concerns for women (Gupta et al., 2024). Recent research from multiple cultural backgrounds such as South Asian societies shows that women face continuous pressure to select family tasks before professional dreams. Societal pressures that prevent women from career success and financial freedom at the same time generate occupational stress which leads to disappointment among working females (Jones & Odhiambo, 2025).

The combination of cultural standards maintains a traditional view of caregiving alongside household duties as female responsibilities which reduces male interest in home activities. Working women generally need to handle their work-life balance challenges independently despite lacking sufficient support. Women experience more exhaustion and find fewer career opportunities because their spouses together with extended family members fail to provide appropriate support in many situations. These traditional gender stereotypes persistently block women from gaining complete professional equality within their work environment (Mahasha, 2016).

### **Workplace Policies and Structural Barriers**

The ability of women to combine work with family care depends heavily on existing workplace policies in organizations. Incidentally most organizations do not implement family-friendly policies which combine flexible work arrangements with parental leave and on-site childcare support which prevents women from balancing their work and family needs. Nationals who lack supportive maternity leave policies together with rigid work schedules commonly need to decide between securing their jobs or caring for their families. The lack of workplace accommodations throughout Pakistan has triggered a substantial number of women to withdraw from employment or accept jobs with lower remuneration and insufficient growth potential (Parlak et al., 2021).

Organizations typically do not create work environments which cater specifically to the different needs of working mothers thus creating additional obstacles for them. Women face limited success in their careers because of inadequate structured programs that provide mentoring and career advancement. The need for flexibility by working women gets met with negative perceptions about their dedication which then adds to existing gender gaps in both upper-level positions and compensation rates. Organizations must implement diverse policies which allow women to advance both their work life and personal life because these institutional barriers create critical demands (Sengar & Shah, 2024).

### **The Motherhood Penalty and Career Progression**

Working mothers encounter employment disadvantages when seeking jobs and pursuing promotions as well as when negotiating salaries under the motherhood penalty phenomenon. Working mothers often get judged by employers as providing less



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dedication and professional skill than other employees who do not have children. Working mothers fail to break through such restrictive career advancement and financial development barriers. Workers who become fathers receive a professional benefit with employers perceiving them as more qualified for promotions and advanced responsibility in their career. The disparity in treatment between workers with and without children enhances gender disparities within professional environments which blocks women from reaching executive positions (Straub, 2007).

The gender penalty connected to motherhood stands most notable within fields dominated by males because these industries require extensive work hours combined with strict work commitment standards to achieve success (Shah, 2024). Female workers who can have children seem less attractive to employers due to expected maternity absence time and requested flexible work accommodations. These discriminatory beliefs both restrict female job advancement and sustain major discrimination patterns in employment systems. The solution for equal treatment of working mothers demands changes in workplace policies and cultural norms about employment for mothers (Shelton & John, 1996).

### **Impact of Work-Life Conflict on Well-Being**

Women face severe impairments to their physical together with mental health state because of struggling to find equilibrium between their jobs and family responsibilities. The acute stress levels combined with burnout create negative effects on job satisfaction which develops from persistent work-family conflicts. When people need to balance multiple roles, their emotional state leads to productivity reduction along with damaged relationships which lowers their life quality. Women find themselves in a state of guilt and frustration when they fail to achieve balance between their work and home life because they lack proficiency in both their professional and family responsibilities (Shah, 2024).

South Asian traditions create substantial familial pressure on women who cannot fulfill their traditional caregiving duties which ends up attracting criticism and pressure from their extended family network. Working women show greater risks for anxiety and depression when work-life stress continues to affect them based on research findings. The prevention of negative outcomes requires supportive environments between home and workplace settings to be established (Uddin, 2021).

### **Strategies for Work-Life Integration**

The improvement of work-life balance for women has been studied through multiple effective strategies by researchers (South & Spitze, 1994). Flexible work arrangements involving remote positions alongside job-sharing programs and variable work hours stand as the most common proposed answer to solve this issue. Women can fulfill their professional goals through implementation of workplace flexibility which lets them balance work commitments comfortably. Organizations which establish gender-inclusive policies through leadership development and mentorship programs make it possible to close the career advancement gaps between women and men (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

The solution to work-life balance problems needs government involvement particularly for parents who work. When governments support parents through financial assistant programs and expanded leave benefits along with strong legal discrimination policies they produce enhanced female employment and improved family health outcomes. Governments which make working mother support policies their top priority will build workplaces that become both fair and welcoming for all employees including working



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parents trying to manage professional and family life. The implementation of such programs delivers empowerment to female labor participants while generating positive outcomes for social stability in society (Woodward, 2007).

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of working women in District Mansehra regarding their struggles in balancing career and family responsibilities. The research examined the multiple challenges facing women regarding socio-cultural aspects along with economic pressures and psychological difficulties in their regular routines. Interviews served as the data collection method using semi-structured in-depth interviews to allow free expression from participants alongside researcher-initiated probing about particular challenges. Working women from education, healthcare and administration and private enterprises participated in the study through purposive sampling to achieve diverse perspectives. The research included 20 participants. The research followed a protocol which included doing interviews in relaxing spaces with recording consent and transcription for subsequent analysis. The researchers used thematic analysis to understand patterns, themes together with sub-themes present within the collected narratives. Data transcription led to coding processes through NVivo software (with manual coding as backup) which produced systematic evaluations of participant life experiences. Four main categories of themes emerged from the analysis to create an extensive view of the phenomenon. The investigators implemented all ethical rules throughout the research process. The researchers offered consent forms to each participant in order to protect their privacy and confirm volunteer participation. The study identified participants with pseudonyms to guarantee confidentiality protection. The research study followed ethical social research practices which protected participants from any harm or distress during the process. The study implemented an exhaustive qualitative research method to deliver crucial understanding about occupational life balance challenges faced by District Mansehra women which resulted in recommendations for workplace reform policy initiatives and gender-sensitive approaches.

### **Results and Discussion**

The key findings from the study surface in the Results and Discussion section of the work after investigators conduct in-depth evaluations and interpretations. The section divides main data insights into separate Themes. A comparison between study results and previous research material takes place within the Discussion section which identifies similarities and differences and explores their implications. A summary of key findings with their critical importance appears in the conclusion. The final component of these studies includes recommendations that provide applicable or theoretical guidelines for future research, policy and practical implementation based on study results.

### **Themes and Narrations**

The qualitative data analysis revealed four major themes describing the difficult situation working women experience while trying to manage their work and family duties. Three main themes identify the working women's most significant problems which comprise demanding time distribution, employee and gender discrimination at work and community expectations to fulfill family duties. The themes lead to a better comprehension of participant experiences by providing supporting evidence through detailed voice recordings from each respondent.



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### **Time Management Struggles**

The primary challenge for working women across District Mansehra involves accomplishing both their occupational duties and household management tasks successfully. The participants described difficulties in meeting their work timetable requirements coupled with duties for family caretaking responsibilities. Female workers experienced both physical and emotional fatigue when they carried out responsibilities between their professional careers and home obligations.

A respondent narrated

“The flow of my daily activities extends from morning darkness to evening darkness. Early each day I begin making breakfast then I take time to prepare lunches for my children before sending them off to school before I leave for my work duties. After numerous hours at school my actual responsibilities begin when I reach home. All domestic tasks that need to be done in the day become my sole responsibility. My day ends when I finally get to bed completely exhausted even though I recognize I must repeat this cycle the following day.”

Another respondent added:

“I continuously find myself short of time in the day. My work environment requires extensive hours while my family reserves expectations that I should be there freely for them during non-work hours. When I stay late at work my in-laws always tell me that I do not take care of my household duties. My quick departure from work makes my supervisor believe that I am not dedicated to reaching professional goals. I embark on an unending battle trying to demonstrate myself properly in both my office setting and family home.”

The collected narratives detail how working women experience incredible stress when trying to honor their professional responsibilities with their household duties. Women face complete exhaustion and stress from continually trying to satisfy requirements at work and in their homes. Women require both home-based support and workplace policies which promote work-life balance to reduce their heavy burdens.

### **Workplace Policies and Gender Bias**

Working women experience different outcomes because of the existing workplace policies that operate in their environment. Multiple employees stated their competence as professionals failed to protect them from discriminatory practices and limited work-life balance support such as maternity accommodations as well as flexible scheduling.

#### **One respondent shared:**

“Throughout my many years in my current department my male colleagues receive promotions at a faster rate than my own progress. The higher position application led to my supervisor expressing that women failed to manage leadership duties effectively because they needed to manage family responsibilities. I experienced deep sadness when I understood that my dedication did not matter because my gender defined my commitment level to my workplace.”

#### **Another respondent added:**

“Female workers receive minimal maternity leave access during a short period but their absence due to childbirth causes their workplace to treat them as an additional burden. My work return happened only two months post-childbirth because I feared job termination. My physical recovery was not complete while my nights remained sleepless yet my workplace refused to provide any support. The situation of being both



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professional and mother appeared to me as two distinct realms that excluded each other from existence.”

The encounters highlight that women encounter insufficient workplace policies combined with persistent gender biases which block their career development. These work complications simultaneously affect job performance while causing stress-related dissatisfaction to women.

### **Societal Expectations and Family Pressure**

Working females in District Mansehra must endure substantial social and familial criticism in this traditional region. Society holds women responsible for family tasks instead of work and families remind women who break the mold that it comes at a cost.

One respondent narrated:

“Members of society frequently ask my husband for permission to let me keep my job. I am frustrated because I dedicated myself to building my career path yet society insists on viewing my professional work as if my husband needs to approve it. The relatives who monitor me insist that my essential work consists of looking after my children and husband while my professional path should play a supporting role. My work brings in a solid compensation which matches my husband's but household partners still place my profession at a lower societal estimation than his.”

### **Another respondent shared:**

“After marrying I received pressure from my in-laws to resign from my employment. According to their definition a good wife stays home to look after her family. My refusal to stop working resulted in continuous disapproval from my family. The relatives would state 'Your job is unnecessary because your husband makes enough money' or 'Working outside the home will lead to your children's difficulty.' The feelings of guilt from continuing my career work became a steady emotional pressure.”

The stories demonstrate how strict traditional beliefs prevent women from advancing their careers. Women who handle work successfully while taking care of their family lives frequently experience frustration due to the undervaluation of their efforts that causes emotional distress.

### **Coping Strategies and Support Systems**

Working women face various challenges but they have used different coping strategies to manage their multiple responsibilities. Stressed working women have discovered two main types of support: they either receive backing from family members or develop time management methods to achieve balance.

One respondent shared:

“I establish definitive limits to split my professional responsibilities from domestic activities. Planning my day ahead enables me to delegate family duties and prevent stress from work from compromising my home life. My husband stands behind me in every way—sharing duties with cooking and child care with me. The collaborative approach between myself and my family members has produced remarkable results in my life.”

Another respondent described:

“I decided to get help from domestic services because it became clear that individual efforts would not be enough to handle everything on my own. The help I receive with household duties has successfully decreased my daily tension. When I need a break, I dedicate time for activities that rejuvenate me such as exercise and reading or simple relaxation. The time I spend away from work enables me to replenish my mental capacity



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which enables me to maintain strength for both my professional duties and family life.”

Working women demonstrate high resilience through their adaptive strategies that help them cope with challenges. Some working women establish effective time management plus acquire external help to reduce workloads but others succeed with family support.

### **Discussion**

Working women in District Mansehra experience multiple difficulties while attempting to manage their professional needs together with their personal responsibilities according to study findings. Traditional patriarchal cultures of Pakistan affect all regions including Mansehra because they force women to place household work above career development. Professional achievements do not exempt these women from enduring ongoing societal pressures which lead to growth hindrances at their workplace. The employment landscape for women in Pakistan holds structural obstacles because workplace policies show gender discrimination and the unequal split of housework and social constraints restrict advancement (Behera et al., 2024). The data analysis resulted in defined themes which this dissertation explains through existing research to explain fully the difficulties faced by working women.

Time management problems represent the main issue which participants disclosed during the survey. Physical and emotional fatigue regularly occurs when working women carry both occupational responsibilities alongside household duties. Pakistani women dedicate six to seven hours each day on unpaid housework and they maintain active professional careers. The respondents revealed that they began their day by cleaning the house before work so they could spend many hours on their job duties and maintain their family responsibilities after finishing at work. Women who fail to give proper attention to either work or family life experience high levels of stress and burnout that hurt their general well-being (Ali et al., 2022). The dual responsibilities of working women in Pakistan are supported by reports from the school teacher and bank employee in this research thus confirming a general phenomenon of unsupported female workforce management.

Women who work navigate more challenging situations because of both workplace policies and gender-related biases at work. Female career development suffers substantially because of inadequate workplace provision for maternity support and inflexible work policies alongside gender-based promotion discrimination. Pakistani workplaces uphold conventional gender stereotypes that present men as suitable leaders but view working women as incapable due to household responsibilities. The results obtained through this study demonstrate similar findings as one government employee expressed how her experience and competence were insufficient to secure a promotion position. National labor policies demonstrate a problem reflected by a nurse's description of inadequate maternity benefits as these policies fail to accommodate working mothers (Straub, 2007). Discriminatory behaviors perpetuate workplace problems that show women hold a lower status than male colleagues instead of being treated equally as primary experts.

Existing social norms together with familial assessment restrict the career development opportunities for women. The people of Mansehra in their traditional society question and criticize working women because they work beyond home duties. Research findings demonstrate that cultural and religious beliefs about gender roles create barriers which hinder female professionals from establishing independence in their work environment (Boo, 2025). Family members according to the college lecturer and pharmacist usually demand women to give their home responsibilities preference over professional endeavors. Working women experience ongoing societal limitations that curtail both



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their workforce involvement and professional alongside financial growth opportunities.

Working women manage their multiple duties by developing different strategies for successful management of their commitments. Literature demonstrates how important it is for working women to have supportive spouses along with effective time management and outside help (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2024). The study carried out demonstrated that maintaining balance depends significantly on supportive spouses who help with managing household tasks. The university professor demonstrates how evolving codes of gender conduct among married couples allows working women to continue their professional trajectories. The marketing executive together with other respondents show how women adopt domestic help and self-care practices as active solutions to manage stress and increase life quality.

Research on women at work in Pakistan shows that Mansehra working women face comparable difficulties according to national statistical evidence. Despite the ongoing challenges stemming from societal norms and workplace biases women demonstrate their dedication to achieve professional achievements through their adaptive nature. Sustainable solutions for these problems call for both governmental policy transformations together with workplace inclusiveness and social changes for gender equality. The ongoing weight working women face will restrict their ability to deliver maximum impact in their families and the economy if proper changes do not occur.

### **Conclusion**

Working women in District Mansehra experience major hindrances as they try to balance work life with home responsibilities according to research results. Working women face career barriers and physical hurdles because traditional gender roles together with workplace discrimination and community expectations persist in their professional lives. Female employees persist through challenges by developing coping strategies which involve receiving family backing and assigning household responsibilities while making their personal needs a priority. The current individual adjustments will not overcome the established systemic constraints unless there are major institutional reforms. The attainment of higher employment gender equality demands both policy reforms throughout the workforce and official workplace inclusivity and wider societal changes in gender perspectives. Women must implement proper strategies that lead them to full workforce inclusion and life balance.

### **Recommendations**

**Implementation of Supportive Workplace Policies:** Employer organizations need to implement flexible scheduling programs and long-term maternity leave and child care programs to meet working women's requirements. Workplace gender biases can be resolved through equal provision of opportunities for promotions and leadership positions.

**Awareness and Advocacy Campaigns:** Government entities along with civil society institutions need to organize public educational campaigns which strive to combat male-dominated standards while promoting sexual equality in society. Campaigns that promote positive stories about working women will change negative social attitudes about women in labor force and eliminate their stigmatization.

**Encouraging Equal Household Responsibilities:** The effort of engaging men and women in household duties must be supported by families. Educational initiatives in



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combination with community-based programs need to transform traditional gender roles to gain the support of spouses toward their working wives.

**Legal and Policy Reforms:** Public agencies should enhance labor legislation through gender-sensitive workplace policies and established procedures against discrimination at the workplace. Organizations should receive benefits for keeping gender equality standards which will encourage them to adopt progressive change in compliance.

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