

PAPER DETAILS

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PAGES: 188-203

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/3626914>

From Dual Roles to Dynamic Equilibrium: An Overview of Theoretical Perspectives Used in Studies Addressing Work-Life Struggles of Working Mothers

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Received: 29.12.2023
Accepted: 11.02.2024
Available Online: 07.04.2024

Abstract: There has been much scholarly attention given to the role of women in the labor market throughout the years. While there are plenty of evaluations of ideas and perspectives regarding work-life concepts, there is limited understanding regarding the theoretical foundation of work-life concerns specifically about mothers. This study aims to provide an overview of theories used to investigate the work-life issues of working mothers. The data were collected from the Web of Science database. A total of 63 research studies examining the work-life challenges faced by working mothers were evaluated based on theoretical frameworks. It was seen that identity theory and gender perspective are dominant perspectives in the current literature. In addition, the prevailing work-life perspectives adopted in the studies are work-life balance and work-life conflict. The study offers a detailed examination of the various theoretical perspectives employed in understanding the work-life difficulties encountered by working mothers.

Keywords: Working Mothers, Work-Life Balance, Work-Life Conflict

1. Introduction

The origins of women's role in work and family life have been the focus of intense discussion in the social sciences since the 1990s (Campillo & Armijo, 2017). Work-life balance is critical to human resource management (HRM) practices that should concern researchers, governments, business leaders, and labor unions worldwide (Bateman et al., 2016). The notions “work” and “working mothers” in literature generally have the meaning of “paid employment” and “women with child/children or pregnant women who engage in paid employment.” Employed women frequently experience workplace pregnancy, maternity leaves, and childcare concerns as significant periods of change in their lives. Nevertheless, working women may experience increased difficulties regarding their identities and positions due to the apparent conflict between their careers and traditional female roles (Buzzanell et al., 2005). Studies on working mothers often find an imbalance between women's work-related obligations and their household environments. Underlying presumptions about women's identities and roles in the family impact the intersection of different social perspectives. In most societies, women generally have responsibilities such as managing household tasks and attending to the needs of children (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Based on this assumption, alternative perspectives propose that women's participation in labor might potentially interfere with household duties or childcare responsibilities. Under this framework, several recommendations are implemented to empower women to fulfill their domestic and familial responsibilities properly. However, these recommendations have often been advantageous for enterprises. For example, organizations offered initiatives such as ensuring the availability of daycare and lactation facilities specifically for mothers. This raises the question of whether mother-friendly programs significantly improve the well-being of mothers. The predominant emphasis of study in the management field revolves around mothers' participation in the workforce or their endeavors to enhance their productivity.

Traditionally, men and women have diverse experiences when balancing work and family responsibilities. In most cultures, women take on more domestic and caregiving tasks while working (Cinamon & Rich, 2002). Studies have discovered that women in Western societies typically have more family responsibilities compared to men, even in families where both partners have careers (Clark & Hill, 2010). Many women cope with several duties by working part-time (Buehler et al., 2011). Childcare obligations are a crucial component that contributes to the fragmented involvement of women in the labor field and is a substantial obstacle to their ability to advance in their careers (McIntosh et al., 2012). Typically, women tend to choose low-level jobs that require fewer hours and offer limited career advancement opportunities. The absence of sufficient formal childcare services worsens this scenario, hindering the ability to achieve a more effective work-life balance and even forcing mothers to leave the workforce (Webber & Williams, 2008).

According to Wattis et al. (2013), flexible working patterns, particularly those that involve shift work, often favor employers rather than mothers and are implemented primarily to enhance productivity. This is seen in the ongoing prevalence of extended working hours in the United Kingdom and the inadequacy of legislation in effectively addressing this issue. Also, the interplay between work and personal life domains for working mothers is a subject of analysis from a broader viewpoint. Businesses and governments are unlikely to truly commit to work-life balance and family-friendly policies because of the contradiction between market interests and compassion (Crompton, 2002). Work-family interactions vary based on differences in cultural assumptions, standards, and social frameworks. Australia was also defined as a male-dominated, neoliberal capitalist society that establishes gendered working and parenting practices as fundamental aspects of women's and men's identities (Turnbull et al., 2020). On the other hand, Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) observed no apparent gender disparity in the perception of work-to-family conflict in Finland's social system. Considering Turkey, research suggest that women devote the most of their time and effort to everyday housekeeping and childcare responsibilities (Atay Avşar, 2013). Timurtkan (2020) demonstrated that working mothers from the private sector in Turkey face pressure as they strive to maintain a balance between their professional lives, domestic responsibilities, and particularly their roles as mothers. This situation necessitates allocating spare time towards domestic responsibilities and childhood care, thereby imposing constraints on their social lives. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a study conducted in Turkey revealed that women who work from home are often perceived as being at rest due to their physical presence in a comfortable environment (Elmas-Atay & Gerçek, 2021).

The phrase "*second shift*" gained prominence through the work of sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her 1989 book, which bears the same title. It denotes the additional domestic and caregiving obligations that numerous employed women undertake upon concluding their paid work. The addition of a second shift can lead to a notable disparity in the allocation of duties within a household. Despite the employment of both partners, societal norms and traditional gender roles can still prevail, resulting in women assuming an unequal burden of domestic responsibilities. When faced with this additional responsibility, women who are employed are more prone to experiencing psychological strain and perceiving themselves as having poorer health compared to women who don't find themselves in this situation (Väänänen et al., 2005). It is crucial to comprehend the role of mothers in the job setting about work-life balance, as emphasized by Warner (2005). The idea that work is not just a source of financial support but also a vital element for personal and social welfare highlights the complex nature of work-life balance. Thus, the main objective of this study is to present a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical frameworks applied in the analysis of work-life issues, with a particular focus on employed mothers. The study intends to fill a gap in the existing literature by thoroughly evaluating the theoretical frameworks used in understanding the work-life problems encountered by working mothers. By filling this gap, this study intends to guide researchers and practitioners focusing on the ongoing debate on ensuring working mothers' well-being.

2. Literature Review on Mothers in the Workforce

In a sociological examination of the historical evolution of the family, it has often been believed that the domestic household and housework emerged as distinct social domains in conjunction with the growth of contemporary industrial society. Within this framework, women were assigned the responsibility, within society, of tending to family needs and household tasks. At the same time, men were expected to engage in the labor force as the primary income earners for the family (Pfau-Effinger, 2004).

Crompton's (2002) remark presents a viewpoint that questions the idea of a substantial change in the conventional distribution of work based on gender, namely the continued existence of the "*male breadwinner model*." This paradigm conventionally entails a framework in which males are predominantly accountable for providing financial support to the family while women undertake caring and household duties. Crompton contends that although women's involvement in the workforce has grown, the underlying structure of this division of labor has not experienced significant changes. Thus, women typically transition from being primary caretakers to a dual role as caretaker and breadwinner, while men transition from sole breadwinners (Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020).

The concept of a "*good mother*" is a socially constructed idea influenced by cultural and historical factors. In modern times, there is a strong emphasis on the "*intensive mothering*" paradigm, as described by Hays in 1996. Garey (1999) contends that within American society, there is a societal expectation for mothers employed outside of the home to minimize the value of any non-financial benefits they derive from their paid work. This is because mothers who choose not to work are susceptible to being accused of self-centeredness and experiencing a decline in their perception of nurturing mothers. On the other hand, the prevalent definition of a "good worker" in the workplace is the "*ideal worker norm*," which argues that employees should have few family interruptions, be available to work full-time throughout their lives, and have single-minded devotion to their organization (Williams, 2001). However, societal norms regarding motherhood contradict the ideals of being a dedicated worker since mothers are supposed to put their children before their paid employment. Miryala and Chiluka (2012) claimed that the workplace has traditionally been linked to masculinity, while women have historically characterized the domestic sphere. Furthermore, they asserted that gender profiles have always had a dominant influence on work-life balance issues.

Becoming a mother is an essential milestone in life that leads women to ponder and examine the type of mother they aspire to be and how they will harmonize their emerging maternal identity with their existing defined identities (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015). According to Hakim (2000), three distinct categories of preference can be identified: "*home-centric*" women, who embrace the traditional division of labor, prioritize family life, and choose not to work; "*adaptive women*," who aim to balance both work and family but do not have a solid commitment to a career; and "*work-centric*" women, who prioritize their professional careers, have been dedicated to them since a young age, and typically choose not to have children. Nevertheless, workplace discrimination, unfair allocation of domestic duties, and restricted availability of support networks can profoundly impact women's capacity to achieve their desired equilibrium between career and family. The preferences and behaviors of women, for example, are also closely associated with social structures and possibilities, such as the presence of a more significant service sector segment in the economy, elements of the labor market, and the availability of childcare (Campillio & Armijo, 2017). Also, work and family roles are prominent in modern society, posing concerns for managers and workers regarding allocating adequate time and resources for their satisfaction (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). The "*career devotions scheme*" states that work requires an expansive devotion, is widespread in administrative positions, and long-hour demands are heavily ingrained in workplace environments (Cha & Weeden, 2014).

Examining mother-friendly policies in management and organizational literature demonstrates a broader acknowledgment of how workplace practices affect employee well-being, organizational performance, and societal expectations regarding work and family life (Kim & Wiggins, 2011; Nayak & Pandey, 2022). These policies are regarded as essential components of a modern and inclusive workplace. Research indicates that employees who have control over their schedules experience reduced work-life conflict, feelings of time inadequacy, increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, well-being, and decreased turnover intentions (Moen et al., 2011). The evidence about the significance of work-life balance for employee well-being and organizational outcomes is widespread and abundant, as demonstrated by various studies showing that the balance between work and personal life has a substantial effect on how well employees do their jobs and how productive their organizations are (Boakye et al., 2021). However, when mothers take maternity leave or utilize flexible work arrangements like working from home, part-time employment, or job sharing to manage their caregiving duties, they are considered to deviate from the ideal worker the norm and face "*flexibility bias*," resulting in being perceived as "*less worthy*" employees and consequently receiving fewer rewards (O'Connor & Cech, 2018). Moreover, engaging in full-time employment and working additional hours beyond the regular schedule are linked to loyalty, dedication, and proficiency. Additionally, part-time employment has been linked to limited commitment and reduced productivity (Kugelberg, 2006). Fuller and Hirsh (2019) discovered that in Canada, flexible work arrangements aim to minimize the disadvantages mothers face. Implementing such policies can also lead to discrimination and prejudice against mothers, resulting in lower wages.

Women's career drive encompasses factors beyond their choices regarding working hours. Other investigations have found that women expressed the significance of their job and career aspirations in shaping their "*identity*" and desire to make a meaningful contribution to society (Stone, 2007). Work-family balance refers to the optimal integration of an individual's responsibilities as an employee and their obligations as a parent (Moen & Dempster-McClain, 1987). Moreover, gender stereotyping is a fundamental aspect of discrimination based on gender in the workplace. Gender disparities exist in the labor market, with men and women dominating distinct parts of the economic system and being unevenly distributed in various occupations. Both historical and contemporary events have shaped gendered definitions of employment, occupations, industries, and roles (Kugelberg, 2006). Also, work-life balance is not solely a work-related issue. Hence, it is imperative for research to not exclusively concentrate on the financial burden dimension of the problem, wherein the economic and employment circumstances are the central focus of the examination (Nomaguchi & Milkie 2017). Research findings suggest that the responsibilities of working mothers, such as childcare and household tasks, not only take up a considerable amount of time but also lead to women being undervalued by others and encountering career obstacles (Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012). On the other hand, certain studies indicate that work-family enrichment yields a favorable spillover effect, fostering positive vitality and facilitating the equilibrium of the work-life dynamic. In his work, Lester (2015) asserts that academia operates under the assumption that faculty members do not have substantial family responsibilities that would require them to be absent from their work. Family obligations are frequently identified as obstacles to the advancement of women in academia and their representation in top positions of management (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Therefore, the work-life challenges working mothers face are a topic of study that involves multiple disciplines and is of interest to both large-scale institutions and individuals.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an overview approach, which refers to a review type that involves reviewing and summarizing specific literature and describing its characteristics using a semi-systematic method (Grant & Booth, 2009). According to the researcher's focus, overviews may be chronological, conceptual,

theoretical, or thematic. Overviews offer a wide-ranging and thorough summary of a particular subject, making them valuable for individuals who are new to the topic. Researchers employ overviews to juxtapose and evaluate various theories within a specific academic domain. Through a comprehensive summary, researchers can determine the similarities and distinctions among different theoretical approaches (Gutiérrez-García et al., 2015). The following steps were taken in this study: defining research criteria for sampling, searching for relevant literature throughout the review of the publications, organizing information, interpretation, and discussion.

The Web of Science Database was selected due to its extensive usage as a data source in social sciences (Salisbury, 2009). The search strategy entailed compiling empirical articles that specifically addressed the work-life issues encountered by employed mothers. The established criteria for this matter include studies that focused on work-life as the primary subject, studies that examined working mothers (women with children or pregnant women) as the unit of analysis, and empirical studies. A total of 74 articles were identified during the initial research using the keywords “*work-life*,” “*work**,” and “*mother**” in the article's title and abstract. A total of 11 articles were excluded since they failed to fulfill the selection criteria. Therefore, 63 studies regarding the theoretical frameworks employed in the research were accessed and comprehensively reviewed.

4. Results

The graphics generated using MS Excel and utilizing WoS data provided an overview of the study sample. Table 1 demonstrates that the number of publications addressing the work-life challenges faced by mothers reached its peak in 2021 ($n = 10$) and 2023 ($n = 9$).

Table 1

Publication Years of Reviewed Articles

Publication Years	n
2021	10
2023	9
2020	7
2022	6
2011	4
2019	4
2008	3
2009	3
2013	3
2014	3
2018	3
2015	2
2017	2
2005	1
2010	1
2012	1
2016	1

A total of 63 publications were chosen from the Web of Science Core Collection to create a visualization of the titles associated with these publications. Table 2 shows the names of the journals containing the articles included in this study. The journals “*Community Work Family*” ($n = 3$), “*Sex Roles*” ($n = 3$), and “*Social Sciences Basel*” ($n = 3$) contained the highest number of articles related to the work-life challenges

faced by mothers. “*Gender Work and Organization*,” “*Journal of Athletic Training*,” and “*Journal of Family and Economic Issues*” contain two articles per journal, and the rest of the journals include only one article.

Table 2

Publication Titles of Reviewed Articles

Publication Titles	n	Publication Titles (Cont'd)	n
Community Work Family	3	International Journal of Contemporary Economics and Administrative Sciences	1
Sex Roles	3	International Journal of Law Policy and The Family	1
Social Sciences Basel	3	International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics	1
Gender Work and Organization	2	Journal Of Advanced Nursing	1
Journal Of Athletic Training	2	Journal Of Applied Research in Higher Education	1
Journal Of Family and Economic Issues	2	Journal Of European Social Policy	1
Academy Of Management Perspectives	1	Journal Of Family Studies	1
Adultspan Journal	1	Journal Of Managerial Psychology	1
Atlantic Journal of Communication	1	Journal Of Obstetrics and Gynaecology	1
Cambridge Prisms Global Mental Health	1	Journal Of Organizational Ethnography	1
Canadian Geographies	1	Journal Of Poverty	1
Career Development International	1	Journal Of Social Service Research	1
Ceskoslovenska Psychologie	1	Journal Of Vocational Behavior	1
Communication Studies	1	Journal Of Women's Health	1
Disability And Rehabilitation	1	Management Communication Quarterly	1
Disability Society	1	Management Learning	1
Education And Science	1	Pacific Business Review International	1
Feminist Theory	1	Palgrave Communications	1
Frontiers In Psychology	1	Personnel Review	1
Gender In Management	1	Qualitative Report	1
Gender Medicine	1	Review Of Economics of The Household	1
Heliyon	1	SA Journal of Human Resource Management	1
Human Resource Development Quarterly	1	Sociological Perspectives	1
Human Resource Management	1	South European Society and Politics	1
Innovative Higher Education	1	Tourism Management	1
The Journal of Humanity Society	1	Work And Occupations	1
International Breastfeeding Journal	1	Work Employment and Society	1

The study's primary objective is to analyze the theoretical methodologies employed in the reviewed studies. According to the information presented in Table 3, the predominant theoretical framework employed to explain mothers' challenges in balancing work and personal life is “*Identity Theory*.” The “*gender role/identity perspective*,” which centers on societal expectations related to gender, is the second most used theoretical approach. “*Spillover*” and “*Boundary/Border Theory*” are widely used theories that researchers find helpful in explaining the issues faced by working mothers in managing their professional and personal lives. These theories highlight the distinction between the work and personal domains in their lives. Additional research has referenced the “*Feminist Approach*,” “*General Strain*

Theory,” “Conservation of Resources,” “Preference Theory,” “Role Theory,” “Human Ecology Perspective,” and “Job Demands Resources Theory.”

Table 3

Broad Theories Used to Explain Working Mothers' Work-Life Struggles

Theory*	Definition	Frequency
Identity Theory	An individual endeavor refers to a personal effort or pursuit, whereas societal roles are the expectations and obligations that must be met to fulfill a specific function. (Stryker & Burke, 2000)	19
Gender Role/Identity Perspective	The conduct of individual men and women reflects the “behaviors, expectations, and role sets” that society defines as masculine or feminine. (O’Neil, 1981)	8
Spillover Theory	A person's disposition, feelings, abilities, and behaviors from one area of their life—their career or personal life—transform into another. (Zedeck, 1992)	6
Boundary/Border Theory	Work and life domains are different aspects of life that can influence each other. Individuals establish and uphold mental borders as a method of streamlining and organizing the two domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000)	5
Feminist Approach	A group of perspectives regarding gender roles, gender identity, or gender discrimination to assess inequalities between men and women (Ferguson, 2017).	5
General Strain Theory	Several sources of strain could be based on “gender, race, social class, or other personal differences” (Agnew, 1992).	4
Conservation of Resources	People endeavor to acquire and maintain a diverse range of resources, encompassing tangible resources, personal resources, and social resources. (Hobfoll, 1989).	3
Preference Theory	Women's decisions about working and family life are determined by their preferences rather than being exclusively dictated by cultural or institutional influences. (Hakim, 1998)	3
Role Theory	Individuals are expected to exhibit a social role encompassing a collection of expectations, actions, and responsibilities linked to a particular social position or rank. (Eagly & Wood, 2012)	3
Human Ecology Perspective	Humans are both living creatures and social beings in communication with their surroundings. (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993)	3
Job Demand Resources Theory	Every job involves demands and resources, and their imbalance could trigger adverse individual outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).	3

***Notes:** Theories are mentioned explicitly in the article. It should be noted that specific articles omit explicit mention of a particular theory.

Source: Table by author.

According to Identity Theory (Zedeck, 1992), working mothers may encounter challenges as they balance conflicting expectations between their professional responsibilities and familial obligations. Managing and harmonizing these several identities might present difficulties, resulting in emotions of role conflict and stress. Similarly, the gender role approach and identity approach posit that adherence to conventional gender stereotypes might potentially increase the challenges faced by mothers who work in balancing their professional and personal lives since it places the burden of caregiving mostly on women. Cultural norms and expectations might give rise to conflicts between work obligations, resulting in difficulties in attaining an appropriate balance between professional and familial duties (Campillo & Armijo, 2017). In parallel, feminist approaches assume that gender-based power dynamics and social inequalities may be the fundamental cause of work-life problems experienced by working mothers. The feminist perspective prioritizes the deconstruction of conventional gender stereotypes that lead to an inequitable allocation of caring duties.

The other dominant theoretical frameworks in the field of work-life studies are “Spillover Theory,” “Boundary Theory,” and “Border Theory.” “Boundary Theory” and “Border Theory” are often used interchangeably, so they are considered together in this study. Given the premise that work and personal life are distinct yet interconnected aspects of the lives of working mothers, the interplay between these domains might result in heightened stress levels and challenges for these individuals (Wattis et al., 2013). For example, familial obligations may extend beyond the boundaries of one's professional life and vice versa. These family-to-work or work-to-family interferences may cause a strain for women. “General Strain Theory” posits that pressures such as caring duties and job demands can induce strain and result in adverse consequences. On the other hand, a depletion or lack of resources in both the professional and family domains might lead to work-life conflicts for working mothers. “The Conservation of Resources Theory” (COR) suggests that individuals strive to acquire, preserve, and safeguard resources that hold significant value for them in both their personal and professional settings (Hobfoll, 2001). Therefore, individuals must utilize the resources readily available in their surroundings to effectively accomplish their goals while minimizing stress and promoting and maintaining good health. From the perspective of COR, obtaining, maintaining, and protecting resources that may contribute to effectively managing work and life demands is crucial for the well-being of working mothers (Boakye et al., 2021). As “Job Demands Resources Theory” posits, the challenges employed mothers face may be attributed to the expectations put on them in both their work and home lives and the accessibility of potential resources.

“Preference Theory” highlights that work-life struggles are not caused solely by societal expectations but emerge when individual preferences conflict with societal expectations (Hakim, 2000). This approach emphasizes that individuals, especially working mothers, possess multiple options for their involvement in paid jobs, family obligations, and the equilibrium between work and personal life.

A considerable number of these theoretical frameworks, Human Ecology, Identity Theory, Gender Role Theory, and Feminist Approach, place significant emphasis on the necessity of considering the broader social context. They acknowledge that cultural expectations, conventions, and institutions substantially influence shaping people's experiences and decisions. “Human Ecology Perspective” takes a more macro approach by taking environmental factors as a determiner of the work-life issues of working mothers. Work-life balance is essential to a good work environment, as emphasized in the ecological systems theory (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). From this perspective, government laws, organizational policies, labor market characteristics, and social expectations are all determiners of the work-life struggles of working mothers.

Some researchers regard work-life approaches as theories relating to work and life issues, whereas others perceive them as concepts and adopt a more comprehensive perspective. In this study, work-life

approaches are evaluated and classified as "perspectives." Table 4 shows the work-life perspectives of the research focused on working mothers. It was observed that the most frequent perspective was "work-life balance."

Table 4

Work-Life Specific Perspectives Used to Explain Working Mothers' Work-Life Struggles

Work-Life Perspective*	Definition	Frequency
Work-Life Balance	The level of individual involvement and contentment with their work and family roles. (Greenhaus et al., 2003)	47
Work-Life Conflict	Incompatibility between work and life domains. (Carlson et al., 2000)	14
Work-Life Enrichment	A positive and mutually beneficial connection between work and life domains (Gatrell et al., 2013)	4
Work-Life Integration	Process of balancing the requirements of work, family, and individual. (Grady & McCarthy, 2008)	3
Work-Life Preference	Women's preferences are the primary determiner of their work-life choices (Hakim, 2006)	2
Work-Life Alignment	Compatibility between work and family in terms of both practicality and shared values. (Kang et al., 2020).	1
Work-Life Management	Establishing clear boundaries between work and family roles. (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012)	1

***Notes:** Some studies adopt more than one perspective.

Source: Table by author.

The notion of work-life balance Highlights the necessity of establishing a distinct boundary between professional and personal life to prevent adverse consequences from one domain affecting the other. Clark (2000) defines work-life balance as the state of being content and effective in both professional and personal domains, with minimum conflict between various responsibilities. Additionally, Grady and McCarthy (2008) demonstrated that the terms "work-life balance" and "work-life integration" are interchangeable. Work-life integration proposes some blending between work and life domains. On the other hand, work-life conflict emphasizes the possibility of tension and problems arising from the overlap between personal and professional spheres, where obligations in one area have a detrimental effect on the other. Work-family conflict occurs when employed persons experience competing demands from their family and work duties, resulting in inter-role conflict (Allen et al., 2000). Although work-life conflict can include obligations and responsibilities unrelated to family life, Kossek and Lee (2017) use the terms "work-life" and "work-family" interchangeably to describe a conflict between different roles.

Work-life enrichment and work-life alignment propose a more positive perspective (Gatrell et al., 2013). Emphasizes the constructive synergy and enrichment between professional and personal spheres. It highlights the notion that experiences in one area can have a favorable impact on another. Similarly, Kang et al. (2020:396) used the term "work-family alignment" to describe the compatibility between work and family regarding practicality and values.

Hakim's (2006) approach to work-life is based on her previous theoretical approach, which focused on individual choices. One of the most comprehensive perspectives is work-life management, which means using strategies and personal abilities to allocate time, energy, and resources efficiently between work and life domains.

5. Discussion

Working mothers have faced increasing pressures over time as they strive to find significance in their work, home life, and personal life, among conflicting priorities and career obligations. (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). With an emphasis on working mothers, this research thoroughly examines the theoretical frameworks used to analyze work-life difficulties. This study seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature by thoroughly analyzing theoretical frameworks used to understand the challenges working mothers face in managing their professional and personal responsibilities.

Research on work-life balance frequently incorporates insights from other fields, such as psychology, sociology, management, and economics. Theoretical frameworks serve as a fundamental basis for comprehending and analyzing research outcomes. Several theories, such as Identity Theory, Gender Role Theory, Feminist Approach, and Human Ecology Perspective, highlight the significance of considering the broader social environment. They acknowledge that cultural expectations and institutions substantially influence shaping individuals' experiences and decisions. The General Strain Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory examine stress and strain issues. They emphasize the impact of several stressors, such as job requirements and a lack of resources, on the challenges employed women face in balancing work and personal life. On the other hand, both Role Theory and Preference Theory emphasize the individual's autonomy. They acknowledge that to achieve a balance between work and personal life, working mothers can renegotiate roles and making decisions based on their preferences.

Boundary/Border Theory and the Spillover Theory refer to the interdependence of one's work and life spheres. The Boundary and Border Theory focuses on the permeability of borders between work and family life, and the Spillover Theory investigates how experiences in one area flow over into the other domain. On the other hand, the influence of organizational characteristics on the challenges of balancing work and personal life is the subject of several theories, including the Human Ecology Perspective and the Job Demand Resources Theory. They highlight the significance of supportive work environments, the availability of resources, and organizational policies in terms of their capacity to facilitate or hinder the experiences of working mothers.

Researchers often have distinct objectives or inquiries they want to answer in their study. For instance, a researcher who wants to comprehend the effects of job pressures on family life may embrace a work-life conflict viewpoint. In contrast, another researcher concentrating on the beneficial connections between work and home life may choose a work-life enrichment perspective. The data collection and analysis techniques might influence the selection of work-life perspectives. To better understand work-life issues, most research is conducted from the standpoint of comparing women's roles with men's. Nevertheless, it is not always the case that a man is present in a mother's life. Subsequent research examines the viewpoint of single mothers regarding the integration of motherhood and employment. For instance, Van Gasse and Mortelmans (2020) emphasize that single mothers are more exposed than their married and male counterparts due to increased financial strain and challenges in parenting ideals. Furthermore, most of the literature implies that being a single mother is the outcome of a divorce or separation; nevertheless, a mother may lose her life partner for natural causes (Thielemans & Mortelmans, 2019).

Another issue is that most studies focus on working mothers' needs to fulfill their home-child demands; however, regardless of their gender roles, mothers have other needs. Boakye et al. (2021) draw attention to the need for mothers to receive a university education and emphasize the struggle between work, home, and study. Furthermore, it is noted that there is limited research on the strategies employed by working mothers who are simultaneously pursuing post-school education to maintain their overall

well-being amidst the demands of work, studies, and motherhood. Mothers face difficulties pursuing higher education since university-level education is commonly linked to increased stress and decreased well-being (Nicklin et al., 2019).

There are differing views on the definition of a mother in research. Some define a mother as a woman who gives birth to or adopts a child, while others view pregnant women as mothers, considering motherhood as a process. For example, Feddersen et al. (2018) adopt an identity perspective and emphasize that mothers or pregnant women may face chronic health conditions. This realistic perspective contradicts the hypothetical notion of a woman who effortlessly juggles the responsibilities of both motherhood and a successful career with undivided attention to another matter.

Work-life balance is rooted in the idea that although work is significant for individuals and society, it is vital for human and societal well-being to have a sense of accomplishment and happiness. According to Warner (2005), the primary reason why working mothers work is money. However, they also work for secondary reasons such as fulfillment, human affection, intellectual stimulation, security and autonomy, and status. In other words, employment allows them to provide for their families while remaining loyal to themselves.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the study sample is based on a single database. In addition, this study seeks to provide a general overview of the current situation of work-life literature focused on women from 2010 to 2023. The scope of this overview is restricted to the theoretical views identified in research papers accessible until the time of data collection. The research seeks to offer an overview of many theoretical viewpoints. However, given this objective's extensive scope, the analysis level for each specific theory or perspective may be constrained. The study may lack an in-depth exploration of the details within each theoretical framework, perhaps ignoring essential aspects. Thus, future research could be focused on a more systematic review or a metatheory study for a deeper understanding.

To summarize, this study enhances scholarly understanding of management. It offers practical guidance for HRM managers in firms, promoting a more knowledgeable and helpful approach to addressing the work-life issues working mothers face. Researchers can utilize the study's findings to highlight gaps and subjects for additional research. Examining current theories enables the creation of research inquiries and the establishment of novel theoretical methodologies to enhance understanding of the discipline. While the primary emphasis of this study is not centered around organizational viewpoints on working mothers, its results indicate many implications. The study encourages HRM managers to foster diversity and inclusion by acknowledging and addressing the distinct experiences of employed mothers. Such comprehension can result in formulating comprehensive policies that address the varied requirements of mothers in the workforce.

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