

### Work Life Balance for Women in Mandalay, Myanmar

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**Abstract:** Myanmar emerged from five decades of isolation- both economically and politically. Myanmar could become one of the next rising stars in Asia if it successfully leverages the natural resources, labor force and geographic advantage. The rapid growth of economic gave rise to tremendously increase the entry of women to labor-market of Myanmar. As the women take on the role of working in addition to their traditional role of the homemaker, they are under great pressure to balance their work and personal lives. This study attempts to understand how work and family related factors influence the work-family balance of female employees Myanmar. The study is based on an exploratory qualitative study of 30 women in both professional and non-professional in both public and private sectors. The result the research provided that their perceptions on engagement of work, pressure, according to the nature of the job, multi-role responsibilities, role conflicts and attempts to negotiate, acceptance of the family superiority culture, the organizational culture and chance of career development provided the positive effect for the employee retention, the main theme of traditional norm does not change that wife should be fully responsible for the family.

**Keywords:** work, Family, Multi-role Responsibilities, Traditional Norms.

#### 1. Introduction

Being isolated for five decades, Myanmar lagged behind in many aspects, especially human resource management practice among local business and many organizations. So increase turnover or labor shortage becomes a major defect in our economic growth. In addition to this, the tie of traditional norms still dominant in some areas. In a transitioning society like Myanmar, where the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caretakers are deeply entrenched, the work-family balance becomes a challenge for women and their employers. The country's most notable strengths are related to innovation and labor market efficiency as well as the sophistication of its business sector (Global Competitiveness Index 2013-14, world economic forum) Productivity is further enhanced by a business sector that offers excellent on the job-training opportunities, both citizens and private companies that are proactive in adapting the latest technologies, and labor markets that balance employee protection with business efficiency. Human resource development is a basic foundation for human capital and long term development. It pushes the country from a resource based economy to a knowledge or innovated economy. Thus, human resource development plays a leading role in successful implementation of economic policies and reliable developments (Policies of Growth and Development of Myanmar for Planning Department).

It aimed to provide quality of life for an employee at the same time retaining the productivity levels of an employee at the work (V. MadhusudhanGoud & K. Nagaraju 892 place). The balance work life score provides an organization with productive and innovative employee (Greenhaus, 2003), whereas disparity in the work life balance tends to develop depressed and dissatisfied staff (Kofodimos, 1993). The concept of work life has been abstracted from the job satisfaction. Though it is a very broad subject which speaks about both career development on one side and the family care on the other side, it is very necessary to know how the people balance the work-demand and domestic compulsions. Work and career life means the aim to grow and earn respect in the organization and society at large and family life means taking care of family, children, parents and husband.

Although many researchers had studied on work-life matter for some decades, their theories based from western accents. Myanmar is one of the Asian countries, so these studies could not provide fully appropriate solution or knowledge about our human resource problem which happened today. The purpose of the study is to share some know about work related problems and influences of traditional norms over the Myanmar people.

### **1.1 Research question**

The qualitative study was conducted to the 30 women in full-time employment as either professional or non-professional in Mandalay, Myanmar. The aim of the study to explore the experiences of women in the work-life dimension and influences on the attitude of women to work, particularly those related to family, the nature of work, traditional norms. There were two key research questions;

- How do women react to the pressures of work and family?
- What factors will influence the women at work?

The paper was structured in three parts. The first part looks at the literature on work-life balance and the phenomenon of women in their work. The second part explores the life histories, work-life issues, and choices of 30 women captured through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The final part discusses the emerging themes from the narratives in the light of the literature on work-family balance and draws conclusions on how working women in Mandalay, Myanmar how manage their lives.

### **1.2 Work/life Balance Construct Definition**

Work/life (family) balance has been given multiple, and at times, inconsistent definitions throughout the research. In 2003, Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, as well as Frone, published well-regarded and highly cited manuscripts on work-life balance. Greenhaus, et al., (2003) proposed a definition of balance that attempted to combine the different foci of prominent researchers in the field: equality (Clark, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 2000; Marks &MacDermid, 1996; Mead, 1964) and engagement (Marks &MacDermid). To this end, they defined balance as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work and family role” (Greenhaus, et al., p. 513).

### **1.3 Myanmar Economic and Social Context**

Myanmar’s production gross domestic product (GDP) is likely to grow about 6% in 2012 and about 6.3% in 2013 (ADB). Inflation has been brought down to a single digit and fiscal deficit are being kept about 4% to 6% of GDP. Reforms in social spending are also apparent, as the recent large increases in education and health budgets confirm. The government appears committed to creating a more inclusive, market-oriented, and private-sector-led economy and one that is open to increase foreign investment.

### **1.4 Myanmar’s labors-Market**

Myanmar’s youthful population will generate a demographic dividend now and in the coming decades. The 15-28 age cohorts currently have 13million young people who are contributing and will continue to contribute their efforts and skills to enhancing productivity and competitiveness. This cohort alone accounts for nearly 40% of the working age population. People below working age also constitute a large portion of the population (25%). With proper schooling and skills or professional training in the years ahead, they will provide the human capital necessary to drive Myanmar’s economic transformation.

### **1.5 Myanmar’s labor law**

Myanmar has numerous laws and enforcement agencies already in place to ensure the protection of Myanmar’s agricultural workers’ interests. These laws directly address the needs of Myanmar’s large agricultural labor force, and include the 2011 Labor Organization Law. This modern, comprehensive reform is supplemented by other laws, including Myanmar’s Minimum Wage Law and Social Security Law. Together, these measures ensure a high standard of living and other essential protections for Myanmar’s many agricultural workers. These new laws supplement a number of measures in place to protect workers, including the Leave and Holiday Act, Employment and Training Act, and Workman’s Compensation Act. Members of Myanmar’s Parliament are presently in the early stages of introducing new legislation to continue to expand the scope of Myanmar’s labor law.

## 2. Literature Review

**3.1** The work-family balance has been conceptualized as an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter-role phenomenon (Marks & MacDermid, 1996), satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict' (Campbell-Clark, 2000, p 349), and 'a satisfying, healthy and productive life that includes work, play and love, that integrates a range of life activities with attention to self and to personal and spiritual development, and that expresses a person's unique wishes, interests, and values' (Kofodimos, 1984, p.xiii; Shaffer, Francesco, Joplin & Lau, 2003). Traditionally, research on the work-family interface has been dominated by a conflict perspective focusing on negative effects such as stress (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Haas, 1999).

To correct the bias of the dominating focus on the negative outcomes of the work-family interface, a growing body of research is focusing on how work and family can benefit each other (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Among the several proposed theoretical concepts include positive spillover (Demerouti, Geurts, & Kompier, 2004), enhancement and enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and facilitation (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007). The facilitation takes place when the gains obtained in one domain are transferred to and enhance the functioning in the other domain. One way a person can be facilitated in the work domain is by support in the home and work domains.

The role of social support has consistently emerged in literature as an important factor that influences work-family balance in a positive manner. Social support outside of work labeled by Marcinkus, Whelan-Berry, and Gordon (2007) as personal, social support may come from an employee's spouse or partner, parents, siblings, children, extended family, and friends. Numerous studies have demonstrated that personal, social support is positively associated with the work-family balance. The personal, social support can be further conceptualized as emotional and instrumental support (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). Instrumental support refers to behaviors and attitudes of family members aimed at assisting day-to-day household activities, such as relieving the employee of household tasks or otherwise accommodating the employee's work requirements (King, 1997). This allows the family member to focus his/her time and preserve energy for work when it might otherwise be scarce; suggesting that it positively influences the individual's functioning at work. Emotional support refers to the expression of feelings to enhance others' affect or behavior (Erickson, 1993). Emotional support contributes to positive affect that helps the individual in the work domain (Wayne et al., 2006).

The role of workplace support, i.e., the support received from supervisors and co-workers (Voydanoff, 2002)] is another critical element of work-family balance. Ezra and Deckman (1996) found that organization and supervisor's understanding of family duties are positively related to satisfaction with the balance between work and family life. Workplace support via an organizational approach involves the implementation of family friendly policies, which are associated with satisfaction with the work-family balance (Ezra & Deckman, 1996). Organization's offer a wide range of work-family benefits and programs to their employees, such as job sharing, telecommuting, job protected parental leave, part-time return to work options, flexible-time, resource and referral services, unpaid family leave, dependent care assistance, shorter standard work weeks, improvement in job conditions, on-site childcare, support groups for working parents, sports facilities, day-care facilities, laundry facilities, and canteen facilities (Lobel & Kossek, 1996; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). Research shows that flexible work arrangements allow individuals to integrate work and family responsibilities in time and space and are instrumental in achieving a healthy work and family balance (Bond, Galinsky, Lord, Staines, Brown, 1998; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993).

Webster (2002) points out that family structures and female roles vary across countries, but overall, women continue to be the primary provider for domestic and childcare responsibilities. The presence of large numbers of women in the workforce and their drive for careers has resulted in increasing attention to work-family balance issues.

### **3. Methodology**

Since, to the best of our knowledge, there are no other studies in the context of the Myanmar human resource management, which attempt to capture the unique dimensions of women's participation in work and their experiences in managing life and work, we felt that an exploratory study such as ours was needed. A semi-structured interview protocol was used, which covered the following topics: educational, work- and family background, career development, expectations at work and experiences of success and failure, definition of their roles at home, the relationships with the family, the organizational and personal support received, and aspirations and dreams. Women were encouraged to illustrate the manner in which they arrived at decisions or the manner in which they coped with conflicts and challenges through specific examples. Women described their decisions to embark on their careers, the life changes they experienced and the decision that they had to make along their career journey. They also shared their dreams and their aspirations about where they saw themselves in the future.

#### **3.1 Preparation for interview**

Initially, participants were contacted with the information about the research's and nature of questions and ensure for their personal security. In the majority of instances this was by telephone a few days later, or contact with a mailing system if no telephone number was provided. Following agreement on a date and time to meet I prepared a place. Participants would then be contacted again to confirm the place we were meeting in.

The clarifications for conflicting or unclear answers were sought either during the interviews or afterwards via telephone conversations. Extensive handwritten notes were taken, which were transcribed at the earliest possible time after the interviews. Judgment sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used Judgment sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to locate information-rich key respondents and care were taken to ensure that the sample represented women with varying marital status and parental status.

In appendix (1) provide the overview of women demographic profile.

Since this was an exploratory study, the researchers used inductive analysis to identify categories, themes, and patterns that emerge from the data (Janesick, 1994).

#### **3.2 Pilot testing**

Three pilot testing was carried out,

First, how do women react to the pressure of work and family? Some answered they used to pressure and others replied that they love their work so they can withstand the pressure from work. It made hard to explore their experiences and asked some examples from their experiences. Second, what factors will influence the women at work? Women from a higher position answered caregiver to children and women from middle level answered work-time or workload. What factors make them hard to decide or great impact?

- Employees (married) answered to continue in their job after child birth and
- Employees (single) answered marriage and work.

To draw meaning from the data, a range of tactics was used, such as comparison/contrast, noting of patterns and themes, clustering, use of metaphors, confirmatory tactics, following up surprises, and checking results with respondents (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding procedures of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were followed, which resulted in the identification of themes from the narratives that are presented in the section on findings.

#### **3.3 Findings of the exploratory study**

Four broad themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews which are relevant to the understanding of work-family balance of women in Mandalay, Myanmar: role responsibilities and fulfillment, work-life challenges and conflict, family vs. work, personal life and family.

### 3.4 Role responsibilities and fulfillment

There were two aspects to the role conflict: the traditional element of time balanced, equal time devoted to work and family (Parasuraman&Greenhaus, 2002), and the role of dependent care which is specific to the Myanmar cultural context. Many respondents have parents or parents-in-law who depend on them for care. Family members reside with them either on a permanent or temporary basis. These women live in so-called joint families. 'Joint family' refers to a social unit with two or three generations of paternally related males and their dependents who share a common residence, eating facilities, and more important, property.

The respondents took the responsibilities to take care of a family member at the same time committed to work.

"Although, my job is quite busy, I have to take care of my parents like preparing for dinner, and accompanying them." (Doctor and family)

"Since, I am an eldest daughter, I have to responsibilities of my siblings." (Manager and family)

### 3.5 Work-life challenges and conflict

Additional working hours were at the expense of home time, while high work intensity or work pressure may result in fatigue, anxiety or other adverse psycho-physiological consequences that can affect the quality of home and family life (White, Hill, McGovern, Mills, & Smeaton, 2003).

"Since, I am the post-graduate student; I have over workload and studies, so that I don't have time for my family. Sometimes, I felt guilty as I cannot accompany my mother's medical check-up even though I am doctor" (career and family)

"As a supervisor of customer service, I have to deal with customers' complaint every day, when I have a problem with my family, I cannot fully concentrate on my job." (Supervisor and family)

### 3.6 Family vs. work

The respondents answered fairly to this question, that if they don't want to lose any of these. And willing to try to negotiate with their family members, especially the husband.

"I will criticize the intensity of the problems and try to find a suitable way to solve that problem." (Doctor and family)

"If I marry to man from another region, I have to quit my job to maintain the family" (accountant and family)

### 3.7 Social support

The balance of work-family becomes positive when they have support from their co-workers, family and their organization.

"We can negotiate our duty shift during the time my child sickness" (nurse, family)

"My husband takes care of the child when I have to go out for my work" (make-up artists, family)

Married women acknowledged that they have less time and energy to spend on their husbands due to their multiple roles that require time and involvement. Women reported to have less time to spend with relatives due to their busy work schedules combined with the fact that, in some cases, relatives live far.

## 4. Discussion

The findings of our study point to the uniqueness of the position of women Mandalay, Myanmar. Firstly, women continues to be the primary providers of domestic and childcare responsibilities. Even among dual-earner career couples, women spend more time on both housework and childcare than their partners, and many feel pushed into a home making role (Adema&Whiteford, 2007). Fulfilling this role can be complicated if domestic help is hard to find and the organization does not provide childcare facilities. This is in contrast to women in the West, especially in Europe, where organizations offer a wide range of work-family benefits and programs such as job protected parental leave (for both fathers and mothers), part-time return to work options, flextime, unpaid family leave, dependent care assistance, on-site childcare, day-care facilities, which enable women to combine work and family more easily (Rajadhyaksha&Smita, 2004; Straub, 2007).

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis highlighted the pervasive factors that impact the work-family balance. The societal role expectations, women's career ambitions, and the way they manage their work and personal lives. They are strongly influenced to perform the roles of homemaker and dependent care provider given the societal expectations; this does require negotiation, both at home and at work in terms of how and when work can be done. Furthermore, women who had taken a slow track in their career growth, mentioned that this was a conscious choice as they felt their families needed them more at that point in time.

## 6. Suggestions

With an increasing number of women entering the workforce, but local organization facing the labor -shortage, it appears that understanding the role of work and family in the lives of women will become an important HR concern. This, in turn, would go a long way in enabling women to perform better at work, be more committed to the organization, and ultimately contribute to the growth of the economy and positively impact society as a whole.

Limitations of the study:

- One of the main limitations of this study was the self-selected nature of the sample.
- This occurred on two levels: that of the organization, and the study participants.
- This is reflected in the qualitative finding, which found participants generally reported a good balance in their lives.
- Knowledge about quality of life is still limited, so some participants did not aware it.
- Tie to traditional norms is still strong in some area so (especially in Upper Myanmar), so their first priority is a family responsibility.

No:	Name	Age	Work	Experience in year	Marital status
1.	TWNA	30	Doctor	7	Married
2.	MTD	35	MD	9	Married
3.	CC	24	Sale supervisor	4	Single
4.	N N	29	Accountant	6	Single
5.	HHH	33	Doctor	8	Married
6	EE	26	Sale promoter	5	Single
7.	IMO	24	Sale	3	Married
8.	AAT	30	Dr.	5	Married
9.	MM	26	Cashier	4	Married
10.	TTN	27	Sale	6	Married
11	EPT	25	Sale	6	Single
12	TTM	26	Cashier	6	Single
13	NN	28	Supervisor	8	Single
14	KKH	24	Hairdresser	3	Single
15	WLK	33	Lecturer	8	Married
16	CTT	40	Consultant, doctor	10	Married
17	LLL	29	Teacher	6	Married
18	SWT	32	Engineer	8	Married
19	TTO	28	Nurse	7	Married
20	LHW	29	Assistant manager	7	Married
21	CWL	36	Office admin	9	Married

22	ZMT	31	Teacher	9	Married
23	KNT	37	Doctor	8	Married
24	CTZM	26	Doctor	4	Single
25	KKK	34	Doctor	8	Single
26	NMM	24	Engineer	3	Single
27	SSW	28	Assistant Manager	7	Single
28	MML	30	Doctor	7	Married
29	PSW	28	Make-up artist	6	Married
30	WZH	36	Accountant	9	Single

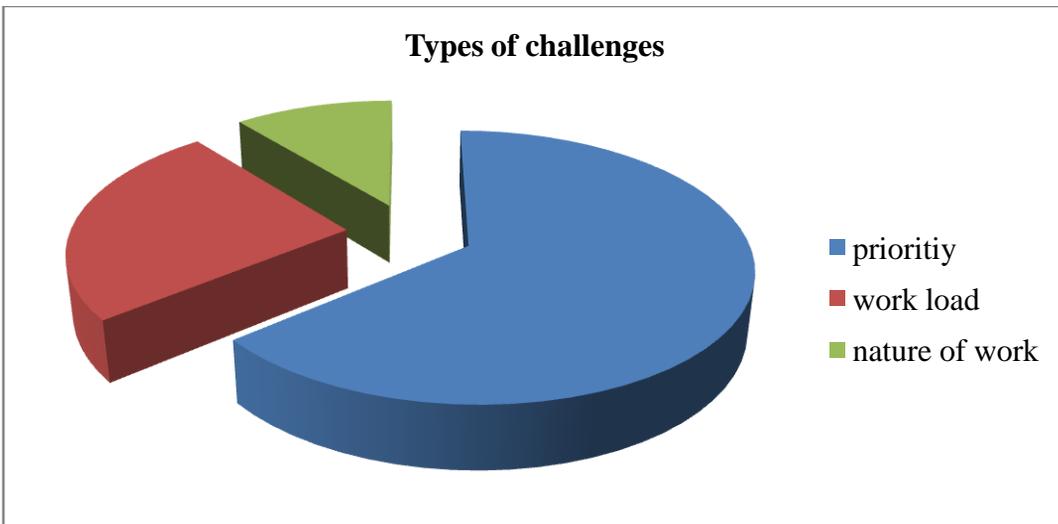
### Overview of woman's respondents' demographic profile

Theme	Category	Dimension
Responsibilities of fulfillment	Multiple roles	Take care of the child Parent Being homemaker
Work-life conflict	Nature of work Work-family programs	Working hours Workload Setting priorities
Family vs. work	Work identify Family identifies	Traditional norms
Social support	Family Coworker Domestic help	Flexible working hours Childcare facilities Working from home Instrumental Emotional

Housewife	15
Parent	8
Personal life	7



Priority	15
Workload	8
Nature of work	7



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