Work-Life Balance of Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh: An Empirical Investigation

By Mustafa Manir Chowdhury, Nazamul Hoque
& Mohammed Jonayed Kabir

International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh

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Keywords: *work life balance, female garment worker, bangladesh.*

I. Introduction

Work–life balance is a situation in which employees are able to give right amount of time and efforts to their work as well as their personal life outside work (Hill et al., 2001, p. 49, Anna 2010). Work-life balance is achieved when an individual can handle both family responsibilities as well as organization's duties perfectly. It is the flexible working arrangements that allow both parents and non-parents to avail of working arrangements that provide a balance between work responsibilities and personal responsibilities (Uddin et al 2013).

Indeed, from the very down to the human civilization, women have been playing very important role mostly in the family not only by rearing offspring and doing household affairs but also by generating income through handicrafts and many other ways(Uddin et al 2013). The role of women is such an important that ignoring their roles no family and society can be progressed and prospered in a balanced and meaningful way. Considering their roles they called half of body. But, with the passage of time the nature and types of roles of women are changing in different society and culture. Undoubtedly a key economic development in the last 50 years has been the substantial and well-documented increase in women's labour force participation (Blyton & Dastmalchian, 2006; McCall, 2005, Straub, 2007) and mothers are now the primary or co-breadwinners in many families of the world. The Economist commented on this trend claiming, "Women's economic empowerment is arguably the biggest social change of our times" (Anna, B., 2010). Economic pressures over the last decade have significantly increased the need for dual-earner families to the point that the majority of families now require two breadwinners to meet rises in the cost of living (Ford et al., 2007; White and Rogers, 2000). Now, the Women are entering into the labor force in large numbers, where majority of them come from middle-class with children into the paid work force, has either directly or indirectly affected virtually everyone in society as people's mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and friends stepped out of the home into paid employment (Perry-Jenkins, et al., 2000).

Thus, the growing number of women in the labor force intensifies the realization that more individuals have to simultaneously manage two domains of life: family and work (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001; Karimi, 2006). Indeed, across nations and occupations, it is still mainly women who are responsible for child and elderly care, household chores and other family-related issues and who, typically regardless of hours worked in paid employment, work a "second shift" at home (Asher, 2011; Broadbridge, 2008; Hochschild, 2003). As a result, conflict and strain often arise for individuals who participate in both of these areas, because role expectations are frequently incompatible (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001; Posig and Kickul, 2004, Simon, Kümmerling, & Hasselhorn, 2004). The conflict is usually bidirectional: work can interfere with the family, and the family can interfere with work (Simon et al., 2004). Work interference with family is more of an issue than family interference with work (Grzywacz, et al 2006; Simon et al., 2004). Although men and women both experience inter-role conflicts, it is often more difficult for women to balance their work and home roles (Walker et al 2008). According to Doherty (2004), this difficulty then becomes the primary source of women's disadvantage in the corporate world and explains their ''concentration in low paid, part-time employment and their absence at the most senior levels of management [in business]'' (p. 433). Thus, the challenge of work-life balance is a reality for every working woman, and it is an issue that is widely

Author α ρ: Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, International Islamic University Chittagong, 240, Nawab Sirajudowla Road, Chawkbazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh.
e-mails: mmanir7@yahoo.com, mjk_iiuc@yahoo.com
Author σ: Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, International Islamic University Chittagong, 240, Nawab Sirajudowla Road, Chawkbazar, Chittagong, Bangladesh.
e-mail: nazam_iiuc@yahoo.com

discussed in organizations and governments today. Women feel entitled to claim this balance, even if it requires formal intervention from institutions and governments. Yet it was not very long ago that work-life balance was a whispered taboo or seen as an individual's personal problem to be resolved in private (Rice, 2000, Anna 2010). For a long time, most women did not believe that they deserved a healthy balance between their work and their lives outside of work, let alone expect and receive formal policies supporting this balance. Even at present, in many cases the term "work-life balance" is not understood as well as recognized officially and socially. In this regard, Greenhaus et al (2003) say, being balanced means approaching each role both in work and family with an approximately equal level of attention, time, involvement, and commitment.

In the past, the issue of work-life balance was dismissed by organizations as a trivial problem not worthy of concern or action. Organizations throughout history have been built by men and for men (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000), and as men's roles in the workplace have changed little since the Industrial Revolution, the challenges women initially confronted when entering these male-dominated workplaces garnered little attention. Now, there is a critical mass of women in the workforce (Shriver, 2009. Anna, 2010), organizations and governments have been forced to recognize women's concerns about work-life balance.

In Bangladeshi society, an individual's identity is largely tied to the identity of the extended family. The majority of Bangladeshi women are still highly responsible for housekeeping, childcare, and all other aspects of running a home (Uddin et al 2013). Despite the traditional structure of family roles in Bangladesh with men as the only breadwinners, a number of women now participate in the workplace. Growing cost of living as well as change of mindset is the key reasons for which increasing number of educated as well as uneducated women are now working outside their house (Uddin et al 2013). Even in recent time, the tendency is increasing gradually. As a result, the traditional family is being replaced by the dualcareer family, thus socio-demographic changes are similar to those in developed and developing societies (Uddin et al 2013). Like all other countries of the world (Lingard et al., 2007), work-life balance of the female employees has become an issue in Bangladesh, especially for those who are working in the garment sector and banking sectors. The inability to balance work and life has severe implications because it affects every aspect of women's lives. The stress created from being pulled in multiple directions has negative consequences for psychological and physical well-being (Kinman & Jones, 2004). When women are spread too thin attempting to satisfy all of the competing demands on their time, they are not able to complete any task to the best of their

ability causing all their roles to suffer. Productivity at work is affected and the quality of women's relationships with friends and family are harmed. This psychological stress stemming from their inability to give 100 percent at work and at home can also produce problems for women's physical health. Poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and high levels of stress that result from poor work-life balance can cause physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, insomnia, and back pains, and sometimes lead to more serious illnesses including heart conditions that result in long-term consequences for women and their families (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Better work life balance creates high levels of employee satisfaction. It provides a solid return for the organization as well as the workforce. Work-life balance programs can also help by reinforcing recruitment, raising employee retention, decreasing absenteeism, limiting late comers, powering up productivity, promoting participation in training, contending with competition and engaging the emerging labor market (Better Balance, Better Business., 2004)

From the literature review, it is clear that there are many benefits of work-life balance and it is an issue for female employees rather than male. This is due to the fact that women still need to perform the key responsibilities in their home. Though many studies conducted on the work-life balance in the context of many developing and developed countries but, no study is found that addressed the work-life balance issues of the female garment workers of Bangladesh. So, this study is conducted to know the status of work-life balance of female workers working in the garment sector of Bangladesh, so that the policy makers can address this issue properly by revising and devising necessary policy and strategy with a view to ensure productive and sincere workforce in the garment industry of Bangladesh.

II. Methodology

The researchers used both primary and secondary data. The primary data regarding work-life balance status have been collected with the help of pre-structured questionnaire surveying 570 female garment workers from 57 garment firms (During June 2014 to January 2015) located in Chittagong, the 2nd largest city and the commercial capital of Bangladesh. A single schedule of statements was prepared. The opinions of the sample respondents were recorded on 5 points Likert-type summated rating scales. The sample as shown below was convenience one. The following table provides the descriptive summary of the sample frame and sample size.

Table 1 : showing sample frame and sample size

Total number of garment firms in Bangladesh	5600
Total number of garment firms in Chittagong	753
Sample size(garment firm)	57
Number of female respondents (10 respondents from each firm)	570

The researchers have focused on of the female garment workers because of the fact that there are 4 million garment workers in Bangladesh of which 80% are female. Since garment sector contributes 81% to export earning, for the survival of garment industry the work-life balance situation of its main workforce (female workers) must be ensured. So, for the economic progress through industrial development of Bangladesh, the work-life balance situation should be improved. The secondary data and information were obtained through library researches and survey of office documents from text books and related available published articles on work-life balance. The data thus collected were tabulated first manually after when they were analyzed by employing statistical techniques like frequency & percentage.

III. Results and Discussion

To investigate the real picture of work-life balance of female workers of garment industry of Bangladesh, a survey has been conducted. The analysis and interpretations of the opinion survey has been appended below:

We see (see table 2) that as regards the statement, "My job and family interfere with one another", 4.03% and 2.98% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement' that is only 7.01% (4.03%+2.98%) respondents think that their job does interfere with each other.

Table 2 :   showing the female garment workers' demography & opinion

Demography		No. of workers			
Age	20 or below	97			
	21-30	198			
	36-45	129			
	46 and above	146			
Total		570			
Education	SSC and Below	296			
	HSC	221			
	Degree and Above	53			
Total		570			

Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Some what agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Total Percentage/ Frequency
My job and family interfere with one another	4.03% (23)	2.98% (17)	13.85% (79)	61.05% (348)	18.07% (103)	100% (570)
I can manage the demands of work and personal life	21.22% (121)	54.73% (312)	17.19% (98)	4.73% (27)	2.10% (12)	100% (570)
I can not enjoy my job because of work-life balance situation	8.59% (49)	11.05% (63)	13.85 (79)	48.42% (276)	19.82% (113)	100% (570)
I will leave the job if I get a better one	3.33% (19)	12.45% (71)	18.24% (104)	33.51% (191)	32.45% (185)	100% (570)

Source: Prepared for this study based on field survey

Whereas, 13.85%, 6%, 61.05 and 18.07% respondents showed respectively 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 92.7% (13.85%+61.05%+18.07%) respondents think that their job does interfere with their family. It indicates that most of the female workers are facing severe problem regarding their work and life balance situation.

As regards the statement, "I can manage the demands of work and personal life ", 21.22% and

54.73% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement', that is, 76%(54.73% + 21.22%) respondents replied that they are unable to manage their work-life properly. Whereas, 17.19%, 4.73%, and 2.10% respondents showed respectively 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 24%(17.19% + 4.73% + 2.10%) respondents replied that their work-life balance situation is manageable. This result is also indicating that most of

the female workers are facing severe problem while managing their both work and life in a balanced way.

As regards the statement, "I can not enjoy my job because of work-life balance situation", 8.59% and 11.05% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement', that is, only 20% (8.59%+11.05%) respondents replied that due to work-life balance situation they are facing no major problem for enjoying their job. Whereas, 13.85%, 48.42%, and 19.82% respondents showed respectively 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 80%(13.85% + 48.42% + 19.82%) workers are not enjoying their work/job because of work-life balance situation.

As regards the statement, "I will leave the job if I get a better one", 3.33% and 12.45% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement', that is, only 16% (3.33%+12.45%) respondents do not want to leave the job because of work-life balance situation. Whereas, 18.24%, 33.51% and 32.45%, respondents showed respectively 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 84%(18.24% + 33.51% + 32.45%) workers want to leave their job because of work –life balance situation are not enjoying their work/job because of work-life balance situation.

Table 3 : showing the effect of family on work

Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Some what agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Total Percentage/ Frequency
My family life has disturbed me in doing my job as good as I could do.	33.16% (189)	40.34% (230)	12.46% (71)	6.49% (37)	7.54% (43)	100% (570)
My family (spouse / parents) is cooperative to maintain a work life balance.	9.12% (52)	7.19% (41)	17.01% (97)	35.2% (201)	31.40% (179)	100% (570)

Source: Prepared for this study based on field survey

We see in above table (table 3) that as regards the statement, "My family life has disturbed me in doing my job as good as I could do.", 33.16% and 40.34% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement' that is, 74% (33.16%+40.34%) respondents replied that their personal or familial life did not disturb them in doing their jobs perfectly. Whereas, 12.46%, 6.49%, and 7.54% respondents showed respectively 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 26% (12.46% + 6.49%, +7.54%) respondents replied that their personal or familial life disturbed them in doing their jobs perfectly

As regards the statement, "My family (spouse / parents) is cooperative to maintain a work life balance.", 9.12% and 7.79% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement' that is, 17% (9.12%+7.79%) respondents replied that their spouse / parents / family is not cooperative. Whereas, 17.01%, 35.2%, and 31.40% respondents showed 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement' respectively, it means, 83% respondents replied their spouse / parents / family is always cooperative in ensuring work-life balance.

Table 4 : showing the effect of work on family

Statement	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Total Percentage/ frequency
Often I face problem in my family due to my job	9.82% (56)	18.25% (104)	25.26% (144)	31.23% (178)	15.44% (88)	100% (570)
My organization is cooperative to maintain work life balance.	18.07% (103)	38.42% (219)	19.82% (113)	15.61% (89)	8.07% (46)	100% (570)

Source: Prepared for this study based on field survey

We see in above table (table 4) that as regards the statement, "Often I face problem in my family due to my job", 9.82% and 18.25% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement' that is, 28% (9.82%+18.25%) respondents replied that their jobs did not disturb them in providing time to their family. Whereas, 25.26%, 31.23%, and 15.44% respondents showed respectively 'some what

agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 72% respondents replied that their jobs disturbed them in providing time to their family.

As regards the statement, "My organization is cooperative to maintain a work life balance., 18.07% and 38.42% respondents respectively showed 'strong disagreement', and 'disagreement' that is, 56.49% (18.07%+38.42%) respondents replied that their

organization is not cooperative enough in ensuring their work-life balance. Whereas, 19.82%, 15.61%, and 8.07% respondents showed respectively 'some what agreement', 'agreement' and 'strongly agreement', it means, 43.51% respondents replied that their organization is cooperative in ensuring their work-life balance.

IV. Improving the Work-Life Balance of the Female Garment Workers of Bangladesh

We sought suggestion from the respondents to improve their work-life balance situation. The respondents mentioned many factors that can improve their work-life balance situations. The suggestions arise from the respondents are as follows;

Table 5 : factors relating with work-life balance status of female garment workers

Factors	Weight (%)	Number of Respondents
Salary	26.49	151
Reduced working hours & workload	21.75	124
Residential facility (near to workplace/factory)	20.88	119
Transport facility	12.11	69
Child care center	8.42	48
Flexible working hours (roistered days off and family friendly starting and finishing times)	5.96	34
Child schooling	4.39	25
Total	100	570

Source: Prepared for this study based on field survey

In the above table (Table 5) it is seen 26.49% (151) respondents opined that salary is highly related to their work-life balance situation because in the garment sectors of Bangladesh workers are not well paid. So for earning extra money (to maintain their livelihood) most of the workers go for overtime work (on an average 3 hours), as a result the family life is affected seriously. It is also found that 21.75% workers think that their present work load and working hours (on an average they work 10-12 hours including overtime) are high for which they are facing problem in maintaining their family properly. If their working hour is reduced to 6 or 8 hours then they think that their work-life balance situation will improve. Of course, their work pressure is to be reduced also. Booth and van Ours (2005) found that Australian women are happier with shorter working hours. Uddin et al (2013) also found that the female teachers working at private educational institution like shorter working hours .

It is also found that by providing residential facility (near to workplace/factory) the work life balance situation can be ensured. In this regard 20.88% female workers replied that company can build staff quarters and thereby improve their work-life balance situation. Studying the work life balance situations of female teachers of private educational institution, Uddin et al (2013) also found the similar result. 12.11% respondents opined that providing transport facility by the employer can help a lot to improve work life balance situation because in Bangladesh transport is a big problem for the employees.

Furthermore, 8.42% replied that child care center arranged by employer can also contribute significantly in improving work-life balance. Whereas, 5.96% think that flexible working hours (roistered days off and family friendly starting and finishing times) can also improve the work life balance situation of female garment workers in Bangladesh. According to Eikhof (2012), flexibility and choice over working hours and location are commonly regarded as a key facilitator for reconciling work and life/family demands, and therefore as an enabler of women's careers and a catalyst of equality in the work place. Again, 4.39% opined that child schooling facility by the employer can help in improving work life balance situation. Similar findings also found by many researchers. (Burke (1994a, b, Cassell, 1997 and Deery, 2008)). Studies have shown that these practices increase employee satisfaction; work ethic and motivation (Friedman, 1992); reduce absenteeism and staff turnover rates (Galinsky and Stein, 1990); raise satisfaction with the balance between work and family (Ezra and Deckman, 1996); and diminish work-family conflict (Goff et al., 1990) and related stress (Johnson, 1995).

V. Limitation and Future Research

There are a number of limitations of this study which is worthy of being mentioned. First, the study conducted only in Chittagong, the second largest division in Bangladesh. Second, the study used

conducted only in Chittagong, the second largest division in Bangladesh. Second, the study used convenience sample techniques. Third, the study did not separate the findings on the basis of the types and nature of garment firms, local firm or foreign firm. Fourth, the study used simple statistical tools like frequency and percentage. In order to overcoming these shortcomings, future studies can include sample from whole country of Bangladesh employing stratified random sampling technique and data can be analyzed by sophisticated statistical tools with a view to explore more reliable and interesting findings.

VI. Conclusion and Policy Implementation

From the survey it is found that 72% (see table 4) respondents replied that their jobs disturbed them in providing time to their family and 28% think that their job did not disturb in providing their time to family. Whereas, 74% (see table 3) respondents replied that their personal or familial life did not disturb them in doing their jobs perfectly and 26% respondents replied that their personal or familial life disturbed them in doing their jobs perfectly. Therefore, the study reveals that both family and job of female garment workers of Bangladesh are being affected due to work-life balance situation. But, familial life is more affected due to job. Thus, work interference with family is more of an issue than family interference with work (Grzywacz, Frone, Brewer, & Kovner, 2006; Simon et al., 2004) for the female garment workers in Bangladesh because women still perform the bulk of household tasks (Hochschild, 1989, 1997). Women in the work force can be blessings only when both family as well as organization will receive proper service from them (Uddin et al 2013). Indeed, an organization can ensure work-life balance situation of female garment workers by ensuring good salary, reduced work load, residential facility (near to workplace/factory), transport facility, child care center, flexible working hours (roistered days off and family friendly starting and finishing times), and child schooling.

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