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Balancing Work-Life: Examining the Career Decisions of Women Educational Leaders

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Abstract

This research study explores the growth of career patterns in women and the factors affecting their career decisions. For women to participate in society, the male-dominated culture was challenged when women decided to have a strong footing in leadership positions and at the same time balance work and life. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate what made these women career-oriented, while simultaneously managing their homes. This qualitative research using the narrative technique examined the causes that led women leaders to work toward their career development. It also investigated as to how this decision affected their lives. Through purposive sampling, eight department heads from different universities in Karachi were selected and interviewed. Through thematic analysis, the data was analyzed. This study implies that women are aware of the effects of their decisions still they pursue their careers because their cause is more important to them. In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding the factors influencing women's career decisions and the impact of these decisions on their lives.

Keywords: career, cause, educational leaders, effect, women leaders, work-life balance

Introduction

Historically women were restricted to kitchens and few of them were allowed to work in factories, farms, or shops. Under the supervision of the male family member (father, husband, or brother) a handful of women had access to higher education (Ali & Rasheed, 2021; Ismail & Kinchin, 2023; Ren & Caudle, 2020). Over the period of time, a tremendous change has been noticed in the traditional practices of Pakistani society, as well. It has been observed that women opting for employment are encouraged by their family members, both male and female (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

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Conventionally, women have been kept out from not only participating in society but also having to fight for their civil rights and their social freedom (Fazal et al., 2019; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Though women had stormed the labor market, they were still not recognized as contributors to society's welfare (Shemahonge et al., 2022). Rather they were paid low and were allowed to take up only female-dominated careers (Helvaci & Eker, 2019; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Nevertheless, a notable change occurred when the number of working women increased in the workplace. This was the beginning of a positive change towards freedom in education and employment (Loyola, 2016). Women have apparently achieved freedom but when it comes to deciding their career path, they are still dependent on their family and their role requirements (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). In terms of discussing career plans, Ren and Caudle (2020), believed that women will have significant implications for their career plans since they have experienced a complicated interchange with the work industry. This occurrence leads women to question today's reliance on what is important for an original and high-yielding society and how to plan a victorious path toward balancing work and life (Fazal et al., 2019).

Rationale

Many prominent women have been recognized in education for their leadership and contribution, particularly in academics (Tiwari, 2019). Observing women persistently carrying on with their leadership roles in developing institutional programs highlights the need to investigate the factors influencing their career paths and success. This is crucial despite the challenges and hindrances they face due to their multiple roles as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, career women, and leaders at home, in workplace, and in community. The main objective of the current study is to understand the reasons that drive Pakistani educational women leaders to start a career. Furthermore, it explores the effects of their decision to choose a career while ensuring that their responsibilities are all being managed at home.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes that lead women leaders of educational institutions to start a career?

2. How does the decision of women leaders to start a career in educational institutions modify their lives?

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Literature Review
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Career Path for Women

Women can attain the same career development opportunities as men if they adopt similar ambitions and abilities. Essentially, women need to mirror the drive and approach typically seen in their male counterparts to achieve career success (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). In another research, emphasis has been paid to work experience leading to women's career success. The other factors that partake in the career development of females are 1) support from an authority level, 2) a documented record of accomplishments, 3) the urge to be successful, 4) a good and skilled manager, 5) being ready to take up career challenges, and 6) capacity to make tough decisions and be assertive (Abbas et al., 2021). The glass ceiling phenomenon in the past has highlighted many interesting standpoints of great interest. One of the many is the stress and low esteem caused in women due to the limitations imposed on women in the workplace (Fazal et al., 2019). Though at higher management positions, both men and women are apt to face stress, but women have reported that they face more due to their gender (Abbas et al., 2021). Discrimination is considered a hindrance to career development in women, even though the discrimination policy is drafted in the workplace to support female workers (Tiwari, 2021). Many women have reported that family responsibility clashes with the organizational system. They struggle to reach the top positions while taking up the responsibility of child care, as their priority compared to their spouse (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Women are stressed as they are working round the clock if not at the office, then at home, which is a hurdle to progress in their career path (Abbas et al., 2021).

The characteristic of an ideal worker is to immerse in work all day, however, this does not coincide with a woman's practical life. Moreover, women with children focus less on their careers than men with children, which causes stress among extremely career-focused women (Taser-Erdogen, 2022). As compared to men, women in their careers tend to retreat or move differently, while men prefer upright advancement. In cases when women become mothers it hinders their upward progress, which makes their career path dissimilar from men (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). The unplanned or biased decision of organizations becomes a hurdle for women to rise to the management positions. The decision-making process for lower-level management is more systematic and impartial, making it easier for women

to receive promotions (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Another hurdle for women trying to move up to the top position is that women have fewer or no male mentors or networking guides available for them. Moreover, management expects women to be available at all times and be as aspiring and driven as their male counterparts. Hence, women managing their family responsibilities lack such characteristics (Ismail & Kinchin, 2023). In return, these women are then considered shy and feeble. Furthermore, the unfairness in the process of choosing the masculine attitude of male co-workers and the shortfall of career planning are some of the hurdles for women to climb to high positions (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

Parents Influence

Recent studies are more inclined toward mothers' influence on their children's selection of careers (Abbas et al., 2021; Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Pecjak & Pirc, 2020) This became significant when women entering the labor force stated that their mothers inspired them to work. Hence, the mother's role in influencing her children for careers was noteworthy, especially in exploring how it is different from a father's influence on his children's careers (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Tiwari (2021), stated that the mother's influence is in contrast with the role of fathers. The reason for the vast difference is the mother's own experiences of education, work, and socializing according to the gender norms of society (Pecjak & Pirc, 2020). Another study by Venter and Kruger (2017) revealed that mothers who were homemakers influenced their daughters to be homemakers, as well. In studies, Barkhuizen et al. (2022) and Ren and Caudle (2020), it is identified that women who had a career in mathematics and science challenged their sons and daughters. Nevertheless, women who chose law or business supported their daughters more than their sons. Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2017), hypothesized that due to the unfair treatment faced by mothers while pursuing their careers in the fields of science and mathematics were more cautious and prepared their daughters and sons for the challenging environment ahead. This constant supporting and challenging environment leads children to identify mothers as more influential than fathers when it comes to career planning. This emphasized the influential role of mothers in constructing career plans for their children, specifically daughters (Ismail & Kinchin, 2023; Pečjak & Pirc, 2020).

Women as Decision-Makers

In contemporary times, society has accepted the roles of women at workplace and home. Similarly, the authoritative position of the male member of family to make decisions has been also challenged. Women are now becoming the decision-makers of the family due to their increasing literacy level and continuous financial contributions to the family (Kim & Baek, 2017). Women are very cautious as compared to men, hence, their decisions are considered safe and logical (Venter & Kruger, 2017). Contrarily, women are not yet ready to make decisions that include risk factors. Therefore, women leave the financial decisions to men to deal with even if she is earning more than their male counterparts. However, upon gaining information regarding finance and wealth and understanding the risks and interests involved, a woman could become confident in taking financial risks (Pečjak & Pirc, 2020). A study conducted in Berlin by Ismail and Kinchin (2023), reveals that financial resources are the reasons that women slack from making financial decisions.

Work-Life Balance

Many intellectuals have explained work and work-life balance, nevertheless, those explanations remained consistent over the past years. Sirgy and Lee (2018), stated the definition of work-life balance as all spheres of life being managed wonderfully without any hitch. According to the definition, this balance demands time, strength, and dedication to maintain balance across all the domains. It also unveils that these challenges can be met while working in different roles inside and outside the workplace. The official work ethics require employees to fully concentrate on work during their working hours and avoid mentioning their personal lives (Helvaci & Eker, 2019). Contrarily, the other speculation put forward by Kim and Baek (2017), was that work and personal lives are interrelated activities and one will have an effect on the other, where usually it is the work that affects the domestic/personal life.

Effects of Balance between Personal and Professional Life

Striking a perfect balance between personal life and professional life is hard to achieve. There is real balance only when women feel that they have done justice to the different roles they play and are simultaneously satisfied with them (McCloskey, 2016). As in the research conducted by Helvaci and Eker (2019), and Delina and Raya (2013), many of the participants stated

that they did not have much time to socialize with their family members and because of this their relationship with their partners was suffering. Family and job pressures create contradictions, leading to an imbalance in work-life for women (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Hence, the idea of balancing work-life is the nucleus of all issues that need to be investigated as women are rising to embrace work either to financially support their families or enhance their careers. Therefore, it becomes crucial to address the difficulties women face every day in this regard. Tiwari (2021), mentions that balance in work-life improves the life quality.

Leadership is affected by different beliefs and perceptual experiences, models, and a variety of cultures (Helvaci & Eker, 2019). Research conducted in Korea is incomparable and different in various ways from the abundance of research conducted on women's leadership in Western countries. The study was based on the practice of accepting hierarchy, overpowering male control, communism, and gender-divided family structure (Ren & Caudle, 2020). Currently, customs have been modified however, simultaneously a drastic change in economic development has been also noticed. Women, once considered underdeveloped human capital, have now become a vital resource for high-quality work. This shift has led more women to engage in economic activities, significantly boosting their social status (Cho et al., 2015). Nevertheless, several of the cultural beliefs are deeply engraved in our society, especially where family structures and fundamental interaction are concerned. Women's roles as mothers and wives are still upheld strongly as the most primal responsibility of women (Goswami, 2021). The most crucial responsibility of Korean mothers is considered to be nurturing and taking care of their children. This becomes the leading obstruction for mothers to pursue their careers and focus on bringing up their children (Kim & Park, 2012; Ismail & Kinchin, 2023). This account points out the obvious social pressure on mothers for their children's education. Furthermore, outside the home, the working hours for men and women are the same in Korea yet women are expected to do most of the household chores all by themselves (Kim & Baek, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

It was noted by theorists that the established theories of career growth are based on the experiences of men who were primarily dominating the workforce (Gallos, 1989). The growth of women's career paths was not considered in the 19th century and so is not evident in the career stage model

as well. The four career stages an individual goes through are establishment, advancement, maintenance, and withdrawal (Taser-Erdogen, 2022). Now, one can pass through these stages at any time of their life, irrespective of when they began their career. These stages of the model may have a different impact on women's lives due to the changes in the roles determined by society. Though it has been highlighted that career models should have the gender element considered (Gallos, 1989), till today career theories have developed without considering women (Taser-Erdogen, 2022). The career development theory (Figure 1) is constructed on the process of development set through heredity and individuals' responses toward the demands of the society or environment. In conclusion, a person's inclination toward a vocation is influenced by their requirements and the satisfaction they derive from their work. This aspect is particularly relevant in the study, as women reported that their motivation for pursuing a career stemmed from varied experiences and personal needs.

Figure 1
Holland's Occupational Model (Maldonado et al., 2020)

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Symbolic Interactionist Feminism

Individuals attain different roles at every stage of their lives (Goco, 2019). Interactionist believes that it is only through human interactions and experiences that information and meaning are gained (Aksana et al., 2009). In other words, symbolic interaction is a method through which understanding of actions takes place. Its meaning varies from person to person in different societies. Hence, the symbolic interactionist theory gives

us an understanding of how the expectations and perceptions came into place for these womens educational leaders .

According to Goco (2019), to understand the behavioral pattern of society, it is necessary to comprehend the prevailing symbols.

The study identified symbols as characteristics of the roles identified by society. This social interaction that gave birth to these symbols constructs a social structure. Further, it forms a sense of self-identity through interaction with the society. Hereafter, the role changes define shifts through life stages. This can vary from easy to difficult subject, to social context, and the situation in life. Numerous characters or roles are adjusted at every stage following the transitions (Goco, 2019). Hence, Symbolic Interactionist Feminism is the theoretical framework used in this research to examine the gender roles and identities are constructed and maintained through social interactions and symbols. This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of women and how they navigate and interpret their social world. By applying Symbolic Interactionist Feminism to the current study, a deep understanding of the complex interplay among individual agency, social interactions, and cultural norms may be gained. This approach provides a nuanced view of how women navigate their career decisions and manage work-life balance and highlights the personal and social dimensions of their experiences.

Conceptual Framework

The research framework used in this study is adopted from Wise et al. (1976). This framework is based on four factors, namely knowledge (awareness of the possibilities and opportunities available and nature of work), value (practices, responsibilities), preferences (priority, learning that has been engraved in one's personality (symbolic interactionist), and self-concepts (knowing oneself, potential, and ability (figure 2). This framework strongly aligns with the study, as female leaders recounted their journeys through its various phases. Before committing to their careers, they weighed factors, such as available opportunities, familial consensus, and logistics management. They prioritized their home responsibilities and preferences, consistently placing family before work. Also, they demonstrated a clear awareness of their capacity to manage both professional and domestic duties, recognizing the challenges and ensuring realistic expectations.

Figure 2

A Framework for Career Awareness (Wise et al. 1976)
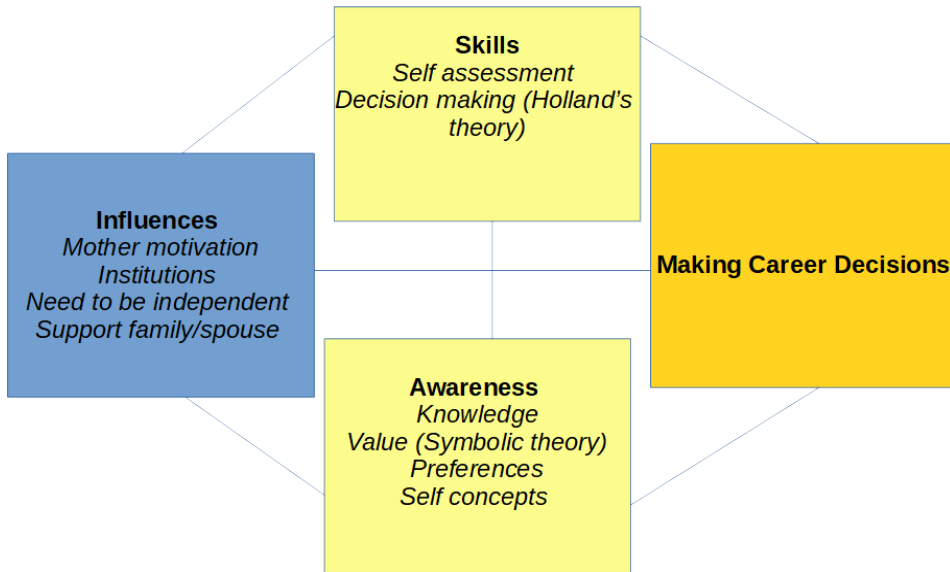
Methodology

This qualitative research study aimed to identify what led women leaders to take a career path or decide to work. It further explored the effects of the decision to choose a career on women's lives. By using a narrative inquiry approach, with interviews as the data gathering technique, the leadership individuality and challenges of the participants in balancing work and life while pursuing their careers were investigated through narrating their leadership stories. The research followed the phonological analysis approach as it is directed to understand and explain the widespread nature of an individual's lived experiences. Hence, the narrative inquiry was best suited for this study (Ismail & Kinchin, 2023). Each participant was interviewed once and the duration was from one hour to two and a half hours in some cases. Moreover, this study followed Giele and Elder (1998), technique that used a life story strategy, this ensured that the outcomes of the narrative approach were met. The life story strategy focused, primarily on the different periods of one's life, such as early adulthood, childhood, and adolescence. It further concentrated on their current life and plans for the future (Heath, 2012; Taser-Erdogan, 2022). The life course approach proposes that women might be identical in age, education, economic status,

and race, yet they might have different moral standards, perspectives, and individual characteristics that either make them career-oriented or homemakers. The qualitative approach is the method that assists in extracting the rich stories of women's lives through interviews in a couple of hours (Giele & Elder, 1998). The research, therefore, applied narrative inquiry and the section of discussion is based on phenomenological analysis.

Participants of the Study

The eight participants selected for this research were department heads at different universities in Karachi. Through the purposive sampling technique, an in-depth understanding of the occurrences in these women leaders' lives was attained. Out of these eight (08) participants, four (04) were married women with children and the other 4 were spinsters (unmarried)., demographics were considered for the selection of participants. The reason for this criterion selection was to ensure that all the participants had the same workload, work responsibilities, work timings, and years of work experience.

The demographics as per the selection criteria are mentioned in the following table.

Table 1
Demographics

Characteristics	Categories
Age	25 years and above
Education	PhD
Working Position	Education Department Heads
Marital Status	Married/Single
Working Hours	Full-time
Work Experience	More than 2 years as Department Heads
Nature of Organization	Public and Private

Collection and Analysis of the Data

Data was collected by personally visiting the participants and recording the interviews, which lasted for more than sixty (60) minutes. The narrative data was analyzed by transcribing the interviews and in some cases, translating because participants were switching to Urdu while being interviewed. Once transcribed, the results were then analyzed to uncover

common and uncommon themes. Applying Corbin and Strauss (2008) technique, for the first step of the open coding, the interview data was sieved and then accentuated to construct codes. The second step was the axial coding whereas, in the third and final step of selective coding, a thematic pattern was originated according to the research questions. Wherever possible, the words and phrases of the participants were used as codes in the process.

The collection of the data took almost three months (March, April, and May - 2023) due to the busy schedules of the participants. Before the meetings, emails were sent informing about the research, however, sometimes the scheduled meetings would get postponed due to the unavailability of participants. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and translated timely. However, 5 of the interviews were transcribed timely, but 3 interviews were rescheduled and transcribed, as the dates were overlapping.

Reliability of the Data

Each participant was given a transcript of interview for review, and during the writing of the findings section, any quoted material from the interviews was also presented for validation. Similarly, multiple coders were used to avoid bias. These multiple coders checked the coding and interpretation of the data. This exploratory study investigated the concept of leadership self-identity in a small sample therefore, the potential biases were addressed to validate the findings.

Results

This section will discuss how women started their careers, what motivated them, or what the reasons were for them being career-oriented. Eight participants were interviewed and the themes that evolved after transcribing the interviews are discussed below under each research question.

Q1. What are the causes that lead women leaders of educational institutions to start a career? Five themes were identified under this question, which are as follows:

Parental Influence

In almost all cases, the mother who was not very educated was more supportive of the daughter's choice. It was she who pushed her daughter to pursue not only her education but also her career. This positive relationship

between mother and daughter became the building force for career decisions. One of the participants responded that,

> When it came to selecting the field for our education, my mother had given us sisters permission to opt for any career. Similarly, when it came to work, she had given us the freedom to choose that too. My mother did not let anyone interfere in our house matters nor were they allowed to interfere in the decision my mother took for us.

Another participant realized the importance of her mother's support which helped her to move forward. She stated that "my mother supported me a lot, she was not much educated but was eager to get me good education".

Another evidence of the mother's unconditional support who was ready to face the consequences of her daughter's choice is given below.

> My father was never interested in what we were doing, it was only my mother who was concerned about our studies and career. She would say, you do what you want and leave it up to me to convince your father about it.

Importance of Families and Careers in Women's Lives

All of the participants thought that their careers were just as important as their families. They managed to succeed and balance their work-life. As reported by a participant, "I work very hard, as I have to do well at my job and also cannot ignore my home and children. Pursuing one's career does not mean ignoring responsibilities. My parents need me. I make sure to fulfil my responsibilities towards them first and then I think about my work".

Financial Support

In the interviews, all eight women mentioned that they were working for their families but at the same time, their careers were also important. "I need to work to help my husband make ends meet. Though I started with this reason magar ab yeh meray career ki baat bhi hay. Main kaam abhi chorna nahi chahti" [but now it is about my career. I don't want to leave my job].

Subsequently, another responded,

> I started work when I saw my husband managing the expenses of the house with great difficulty. I did not want my children's studies to be put behind or considered least important, that is why working was necessary for me and today I am the one paying my children's school fees and the school they go to is also my decision.

Some respondents started working way before marriage, so even supporting siblings became their priority.

> Being the eldest, I started working to ensure that my sisters and my brother got a good education after my dad passed away. While I was thinking about them, I too groomed myself academically, of course, did not pursue the subject I wanted to study but wanted to equip myself to get a good salary.

> Another respondent said, "Meray abbu kay baad, ammi ko help karna tha financially tou parhayee kay sath may nay job bhu ki". [After my father's demise, I had to help my mother financially, so I started to work along with my studies].

Self - Reliant

Participants mentioned that they did not want to depend on their family members (fathers or brothers) either as spinsters or divorced. They also did not want themselves in a scenario where after their father's death they had to take up jobs to be independent.

A participant mentioned "My father had clearly said that I cannot afford your education, this is enough. Now you should get married and settle down. I wanted to complete my Bachelor's degree, so I started working to support myself". Another participant proclaimed that "after my father passed away, my mother did not want my uncles' interference at home, so we both started working to be financially independent".

Recognition

Some of the respondents observed that society considers paid jobs as a criterion for success or declares a human being a contributing individual either at home or in society as compared to housewives. Therefore, women opted for jobs for this recognition.

Interestingly one participant shared,

My marriage was arranged and my husband has to go out of the city frequently for his work. One day my husband said that since my job is only to take care of the house it should not be that difficult and I get ample time to rest whereas, he craves for that leisure time. I realized that my husband thinks that housework is a menial task and I only have limited abilities. I wanted to prove that I could do more and also gain some respect from him, and show that both can be done, that is work and rest. (After narrating the experiences, the participant responded with laughter)

Another mentioned how she felt appreciated, "when I started working, I was appreciated by my superiors and my family was also very appreciative of my contribution. This led me to excel and move forward in my role as a leader".

Q2. How has the decision of women leaders to start a career in educational institutions modified their lives?

The themes identified for the second question are mentioned below. Most of the women leaders identified no difference in their personalities or life. However, they mentioned that people around them noticed some changes in them which they realized afterward.

Changes in Physical and Mental Health

Two participants mentioned that it was their mothers who identified that their mental and physical health was being disturbed by constant work. "My mother always tells me to slow down, this work is affecting your health, she says. You are working most of the time and do not take out time for yourself", reported a participant.

Whereas, some mentioned that their health has been sabotaged.

No doubt I have been trying my best to manage both home and work in the best way I could. I could not afford my children's upbringing to go wrong or my work suffering. In juggling this, I have only jeopardized my health in this regard.

Some participants are aware of their health issues but are not ready to consider them as they think it is not a priority for them at the moment.

Like one said, "Not many changes have taken place in me, only my health is being affected, but it's not a big problem. I can manage it".

The other said, "Sometimes, I am so engrossed in my work that I ignore my house which makes me feel guilty and to do justice on both these fronts I have to make extra effort, which is stressful".

Prefer Isolation

Some participants, while talking about their usage of free time, mentioned that they prefer to spend their time at home and if possible, alone.

One participant responded by laughing out loud, "My friends say it is because of me that they usually have to postpone their get-together plan, ha ha aha".

Another giving reason for staying alone mentioned, "I prefer staying at home rather than going for occasions as I seldom get a chance to be alone and relax".

Another mentioned very sadly, "Sometimes I want people to leave me alone and that I can only demand from my family that makes me feel guilty as I am giving up on my family time".

Eager to Succeed

The changes that took place in the women leaders after starting their careers were surprising. As one participant remarked, "I started working to support my family but I don't know when (smiling) I became so engrossed in it that I was always looking forward to moving upwards".

Similarly, another mentioned, "kaam shuru kia kuon kay majboori theee magar abhi main kaam kuch is say ziada hasil karnay kay liay karna chati hoon aur kuch alag karna chahti hoon". [Initially, it was need-based but now I want to achieve more and do something different].

In some cases, the respondents wanted to achieve more but also did not want to leave their family responsibilities aside. As one respondent mentioned, "I started as a teacher but then as I was being successful, I wanted to do more. I was more persistent and more focused on building my career but at no cost wanted my family role to be disturbed".

Another respondent noticed that,

> I was becoming more confident and independent, not only in my decisions but also in my dealings. Earlier I would talk to my family members before embarking on a task or taking up a new

responsibility. But now as if it is happening automatically, I first take the action and then inform. My family members are ok with it.

Decision-Maker in the Family

Respondents, while sharing the change in them, highlighted that now they are considered an important figure in their family. The family members and relatives look up to her for advice and acknowledgment.

As one participant mentioned, "My family members are more dependent on my decisions and my suggestions and advice. Sometimes, it becomes a problem but I have to manage this".

Another remarked, "I realized I was developing the characteristics of a male leader to lead as it was the requirement of my position, for no one will take me seriously".

Discussion

It is observed that in recent times, women are found to be in leadership positions in many departments. It is of great significance to study the phenomenon of women making decisions regarding their careers and then pursuing them to attain expertise and eventually take up the position of a leader. The literature available does not discuss women's careers but rather focuses on what instigated them to chase this passion or interest. Extensive study about the consequence of these career-oriented women's decisions is found in a small number (Tiwari, 2021). This study aimed to identify the factors that led women to think about their careers and also to explore the consequences of their decisions to pursue their careers. The discussion segment analyses the findings of this study in light of the data collected, the literature reviewed, and the theories identified for women taking up careers and balancing work-life.

Rationale for Career Decisions

The study discovered that there were many reasons for women to start a job and then make it their career. It started from their home where they were supported by their family and especially the mothers played an important role in understanding and motivating their daughter's choices. On the contrary, in a study by Sharif et al. (2019), it has been emphasized that within the eastern society, in reality, fathers are the ones who contribute to the upbringing and guide their children in their career decisions. Similarly, Agha (2022) also claims that male members of a Pakistani family play a

dominating role in women's decisions regarding their careers, education, and others. In this study, mothers influenced their daughters' career decisions. In Pakistani culture, men are considered breadwinners and typically do not engage much in child-rearing or household chores, all these are seen as women's responsibilities (Zulfiqar et al., 2024). Participants' mothers, on the other hand, were not career-oriented. Therefore, they supported their daughters to do better than them that is not only be career-oriented but also excel in education and achieve high positions at their workplace. A study conducted by Pecjak and Pirc (2020), also reached a similar conclusion that mothers' influence on their children's career selection is obvious. In the study, it was identified that the mother's own experiences of education, work, and socializing according to the gender norms of the society play an important role. Similarly, the result of this research was identical in that mothers were the influencers for their daughter's career. Furthermore, the results per the findings reported by Goswami (2021) and Tiwari, (2021), declared that when daughters discuss their concerns with their mothers, this leads to making communication easy and comfortable between them. On the other hand, fathers were either informed as figureheads or participated later in the discussion when the decision had already been taken. It is because of these time-to-time discussions that mothers become the sole influencers.

This research identified that women consider family responsibility as an important role among many that they perform. Some of the participants reported that they were ready to give up their positions if their families had been at risk of not being attended to. Ismail and Kinchin (2023), and Loyola (2016), reached a similar conclusion that if family responsibility clashes with the organization, women choose their family. They struggle to reach the top position while taking up dual responsibility. Women consider child care as their priority compared to their spouse. This finding is so much aligned with the theory of symbolic interactionism, where interactionist believes that it is only through human interaction information is gained and human makes meaning according to their experience (Aksana et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is real balance only when the individual feels that she has done justice to all her roles and is satisfied with them (McCloskey, 2016). Nevertheless, much of the Korean culture believes that as far as the family structures and fundamental interactions are concerned, women's role as mothers and wives is still upheld strongly as the most primal

responsibility of women (Cho et al., 2015). In other words, a role is inculcated through interaction in the society.

Furthermore, the theory identified by Holland (1997), is that working people acquire a career because development takes place through heredity and individuals respond to the demands of society or the environment. A person is pulled towards a vocation depending on their personal need and the satisfaction level experienced while working. Hence the factors identified by Holland are very much connected with the findings of this research as well. There are some set tasks that the society has identified. Both girls and boys are brought up in this environment where such values and practices are instigated in children right from birth (Holland, 1997). Symbolic interactionist theory plays its part where it sets the responsibility that a girl or a boy child has to carry. This automatically becomes part of their personality and practices, leading them to make career choices. As mentioned in the literature review, the symbolic interactionist theorists do confirm that the role assigned to men and women becomes instinctive (Goco, 2019). Hence, women cannot consider not taking care of their children and family, they feel guilty when they are not fulfilling this responsibility. In this study too, women are deciding according to their convenience to ensure that they can balance both work and domestic life.

Another interesting finding that surfaced from this research is that all the participants started working to support and help their husbands or parents to manage the house expenses. This finding is not according to Pecjak and Pirc's (2020) findings, which mentioned that women participate in all family matters except economic matters. However, Venter and Kruger (2017) supported the finding by reporting that women are eager to embrace work in order to support their families financially. According to the findings of Fazal et al. (2019), salary was identified as the foremost consideration for entering the work industry or change in lifestyle. Hence, this leads to the realization that reasons for starting a career, are either due to time or cultural practices.

Previously, women leaders mentioned that they started their careers because they wanted to be autonomous and depend on no one or less on their male family members. Most of the women highlighted that they all wanted to be independent, which led them to follow their careers thus, self-reliance was a new finding. This idea of wanting to be independent most probably stemmed out from women who observed their male members in

the family who gained recognition only when they were independent. It is important to note that the present evidence relies on women who were not only divorced and single but even women who were married and mothers. Moreover, women reported that they had to act like their male counterparts to be successful and recognized for their work. This result is very consistent with Pecjak and Pirc (2020) and Delina and Raya (2013), that for a woman to have a successful career, following a male model is the criterion along with fulfilling her family responsibility. This is evident from the current study that women leaders had to make many changes in their personalities and working habits to be successful and get recognized in the workplace.

Consequences of Pursuing a Career

The glass ceiling phenomenon prevents qualified women from reaching top leadership positions in organizations. One of the many reasons is the stress caused and the lowering of self-esteem in women due to the limitations or hurdles imposed on them in the workplace (Maldonado et al., 2020). Though at higher management positions both men and women are apt to face stress, women have reported that they face more due to their gender. Moreover, as reported by Goswami (2021), generally, compared to men with children, women with children focus less on their careers, instead causing stress in extremely career-focused women. Tiwari, (2021) mentions that the characteristic of an ideal worker is an individual who is immersed in work all day, this however, does not coincide with a woman's practical life, as she is more focused on her family. The literature also highlights that women with children are usually stressed, as they are working round the clock if not at the office, then at home, which is an obstacle to progress in their career path (Goswami, 2021; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). The imbalance noticed at the higher positions in the workplace is because women are more focused on balancing work and life, they are not given the chance of advancement (Maldonado et al., 2020). Hence, women with children focus less on their careers as compared to single women. Henceforth, the participants of this study preferred solitude and whenever they got a chance, they would use it. Most probably, this isolation rejuvenates the women leader for the next day.

The current study also revealed that the women leaders of this study are no doubt very aspiring and want to progress or reach higher levels. A study by Goswami (2021) disagrees with the findings where he declares that as compared to men, women in their careers tend to retreat or move differently,

while men prefer upright advancement. When women become mothers, it can hinder their upward career progress, leading to a career path that differs significantly from that of men. On the other hand, women take more time to research the organizational level of requirements to move up the ladder because she is not consistent in working for an organization for a long period as compared to men (Barkhuizen, et al., 2022). Research proves that women in middle adulthood experience the energy and have a purpose to work (Welmilla, 2020). On the contrary, Krishnan et al. (2020) mentioned that women looking for career growth are very competitive. This is true in the case of single women in the current study. A single clarification for being extremely engaged in a profession is that being occupied thoroughly is a sign of obligation to try hard for career development. An alternative description of this result is that women leaders consider career development an important goal and life achievement. However, if moving up, to the upper level for women, depends upon the system of the process for decision-making for the managing body, women in this case will always remain in the minority at the upper level (Tiwari, 2021). This unplanned and biased decision of organizations is again a hurdle and cause of stress for women to rise to management positions. In cases, when women become mothers, their upward progress is hindered, which makes their career path dissimilar from men, even if women leaders are goal-oriented and professional.

The study interestingly discovered that it was not all negative consequences that took place but rather there were some positive outcomes, as well. Among them, one was that the family members had started considering the women leaders' suggestions and decisions important in the family's financial, economic, or other matters. Maldonado et al. (2020), agrees that the role of women being the decision-makers of the family has increased over time. One being the increase in their literacy level and the other is being able to contribute financially, hence becoming part of making financial decisions for the family (Aggarwal & Singh, 2019).

Despite the different childhood experiences, each participant mentioned that they started their career to assist their families and contribute financially (Aggarwal & Singh, 2019). Educational women leaders chose family over work, their parents were supportive and suffering from stress to ensure a balance between work and life. These women relied on solitude to energize themselves and showed eagerness to reach a higher level (Ismail and Kinchin (2023), but all reported hurdles, such as some mentioned families

and some mentioned the masculine working style, and few mentioned the faulty system (Barkhuizen, et al., 2022). Eventually, they all were proud of being able to decide for not only themselves but also for others, in short, they were decision-makers of the family (Maldonado et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Notably, it has been observed that women's career choices and decisions are influenced by several factors. However, in the process, they made sure that their family role was not compromised in any way. A longitudinal study would have made a great difference in studying women leaders pursuing their careers. This study was limited to only eight women leaders whereas it was only a one-time meeting with them. However, conducting a narrative interview to gather information is not alone sufficient to study someone's progress and be knowledgeable about their hurdles or opportunities. Follow-up interviews will help to clarify any question that arises post-interview.

Implication and Recommendations

Based on the conclusion drawn from this study, it is implied that while making career decisions, women are aware of the effects or consequences of the decisions they make, but even then, they pursue their careers because these women leaders consider the cause to be more important than its effect. Following are some of the proposed recommendations.

1. The increased number of participants in this qualitative research would ensure consistency in the findings.

2. A quantitative study of working women should be conducted to ensure the generalizability of the findings.

3. Society should modify its cultural standards so that working women alone are not held responsible for taking up the role of childcare. On the contrary, men should be taught to share the home and childcare responsibilities equally.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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