

Basic Model of Work-life Balance for Married Women Working in Public Sector in Penang, Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper is to discuss a basic model of work-life balance for married women working in public sector. The model is formulated based surveys received from seventy-six (76) respondents working in various public sectors in Komplek Tun Abdul Razak (KOMTAR) Penang. The study discovered that basically there are two main factors contribute to work-life balance, family related factors and job-related factors. In addition, to achieve work-life balance and to ensure productive and efficient working women, there should be incentives and services provided by the employers and government/non-government agencies to ease the burden of working women both in managing their families and their work. The incentives and services suggested by the respondents are suitable and flexible leave policies, dependent care centres, flexible working hours and work-family activities and support system and also counselling service or employee assistance programme. Since the model is formulated based on a study carried-out only on a small number of respondents, further studies should be carried-out to confirm the model or to up-grade the model. However, the model can be a basic model for more detail and comprehensive model of work-life balance for working women in Malaysia in future.

Keywords

Basic Work-life Balance Model, Working Women, Public Sector, Work-life Balance.

Introduction

Aiming to achieve as a high-income country, participation of women in labour force is very much needed by this country to realize the achievement. In addition, to become a high-income country, the labour force should comprised of those who are highly motivated, efficient and effective in accomplishing their task. To achieve that, the overall wellbeing and livelihoods of the labour force should be the priority. This is because

studies have shown that there is a close relationship between happiness and achievement and individual excellence (Abendroth, & Den Dulk, 2011).

To achieve a high-income country, Malaysia needs to increase the number of employments or full employment for both men and women. Therefore, promoting women into labour force in Malaysia is imperative as the country is experiencing lower percentage of working women than many of the Asian countries even though annually, the percentage of women graduates is higher than men. There are various reasons for women not to work. Among them are the fundamental issues and problems faced by married working women in managing work-life balance and insufficient affordable and suitable support system such as child care and elderly care services and facilities, household cleaning services and so on. Without the additional supporting system, married working women would be under pressure to balance their job and housework as they have to play multiple roles at home and work (Delina & Raya, 2013). With proper and suitable support system, married working women would be more encouraged to join the labour force in future and would be able to manage their work both at home and work efficiently.

Therefore, the additional support system, infrastructure and services to resolve work-life conflict have to be addressed. Based on the above discussion, a construction of work-life balance model is vital to set parameters of essential factors including incentives, facilities, services and infrastructure to take into account in promoting work-life balance among women abour force in Malaysia.

Work-life balance among working women stimulates innumerable positive impact to the nation. The central impact is improving the wellbeing of the overall population, organizations and nation. For example, Thevanes & Mangaleswaran (2018) emphasize that work-life balance or work-life harmony provides advantages to both employees and employers. The employees would be more committed, motivated and productive in their work which would contribute to positive impacts to their organizations.

This paper is to discuss a basic model of work-life balance for married women working in public sector. The model is formulated based on surveys distributed to seventy-six (76) respondents working in various public sectors at Komplek Tun Abdul Razak (KOMTAR) Penang.

Problem Statement

The Eleventh Malaysia Plan emphasizes the importance of developing human capital to generate and sustain Malaysia's economic growth (Eleventh Malaysia Plan). Various

efforts have been undertaken by various agencies in Malaysia in an effort to provide skilled and productive workforce. The effort to transform the education system to create more skilled manpower in the future to target various types of skills and levels of education to avoid unnecessary drop-outs among the school leavers.

With the liberation of education, Malaysia should be experiencing a large proportion of women entering the formal workforce. However, despite that only 36.3 percent of Malaysian women in labour force which is far below than the average number of working women in developed countries (Women, Family and Community Development, 2012). In addition, statistics has shown that even though in most of higher education institutions have majority of graduates are female (around 70 percent), only 30 percent of those graduated are in labour force, while the rest chose to become full-time housewives (Roslilee, Nurul Nadia and Mawarti Ashik, 2016). This gives the impression that education costs invested did not give a good return or contribution to the country. It is a big loss to the country as these well-educated women are not productively contributing to the country's economic growth.

Many studies have discovered that young working mothers have difficulties in balancing between work and family life (Delina & Raya, 2013, Pradhan, 2016 and Boushey, 2016). Lacked of social and physical support on childcare and managing house work has some influence on their job performance. It may result in less productivity, inefficient and ineffective job management.

To ensure that existing workforce can effectively carry out their duties, the government has encouraged employers to provide childcare centers, providing financial incentives to reduce the burden of low-income families. Yet, despite the initiatives, the percentage of women involvement in labour force in Malaysia is experiencing a slow increase that is from 44 percent in 1982 to 49 percent in 2012, 52.4 percent in 2013 and 55.8% in 2019 (MWFCD, 2014 and Roslilee, Nurul Nadia & Mawarti Ashik, 2016, Department of Statistics, 2020).

With the current 3.3 percent unemployment rate, Malaysia can proudly claim that the country will enjoy full employment rate in the near future (Department of Statistics, 2020). To ensure that the existing women in labour force can carry-out their duties effectively and able to manage and their family efficiently and at the same time to encourage more women to join the labour force, the additional support system, infrastructure and services needed to resolve work-life conflict have to be addressed. As the fundamental issues abstaining married women from the labour force is family related

management issues, it is imperative to construct a work-life balance model. Currently, there is still no comprehensive framework/model constructed to address the issues of work-life conflict.

The model would provide a framework and a parameter for the policy makers in formulating new policies or improving the existing policies related to promoting women in labour sector. The model would also help the related agencies to plan and furnish related services, infrastructures and facilities to attract more women in the labour force. This would also enhance the performance and achievement of women in their home and work management.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to discuss a basic career management models for working women towards the formation of ‘keluarga sakinah’ (harmonious family), attentively in fostering excellent human capital, productive and innovative individuals, as well as reducing crime and cost of living in line with the achievement of a high-income nation. The model is constructed from a finding of a study that has identified the fundamental issues and problems facing by married working women in managing their work-life balance. The study has also gathered the respondents’ opinions on the supporting infrastructure, social support, services and infrastructures needed to help them to alleviate their problem and to improve their work-life balance.

This study only focusses at the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia including Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and Perak. However, with limited funding, we decided to choose one of the northern states. So, we decided to choose Penang with the following reasons. Penang is the biggest contributor to Gross Domestic Product (KDNK) with a contribution of 6.6% of a total Malaysia KDNK in year 2015. Compared to other north states, Perak and Kedah contributed about 5.5% and 3.4% respectively, while Perlis has contributed about 0.5% to the overall KDNK of the country. Moreover, Penang is one of the biggest contributor to KDNK after Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, Johor, and Sabah (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2013). Hence, Penang is the most developed and urbanised state in the north with rapid economic activities compared to others. Living in an urban and developed city bring more stress and negative affects to the population (Lederbogen et al., 2011). It also requires a more robust support system to ensure the well-being of the population.

Penang is chosen as a study area to illustrate the management of work-life balance quality through social support system. The population of Penang stood at nearly 1.66 million as

of 2015, while its population density rose to 1666.3 km square. In the same year, Penang has recorded a total of 848.1 thousand labor force and 834.2 thousand employment, while the distribution of male and female workers in Penang are 80.6 thousand and 59 thousand respectively (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2016). The population of this study consists of women working-class families in public sector at Tun Abdul Razak Complex (KOMTAR).

Data Collection Method

Data collection methods are the most crucial part in a research. This study involves two types of data: quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data is obtained from the questionnaire forms distributed to the respondents while the qualitative data is obtained from semi-structured interviews of selected respondents.

A total of seventy-six respondents were surveyed. The respondents were aged between 23 to 42 years-old with children aged between 0-12 years. Their working experience were between 5 to 18 years. Background of the respondents are as displayed in table 1

Table 1 Background of the Respondents

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age		
Below 30	14	18.4
30-39	41	53.9
40 and above	16	21.1
Ethnic		
Malay	72	94.7
Indian	3	3.9
Others	1	1.3
Religion		
Islam	73	96.1
Christian	1	1.3
Buddhist	1	1.3
Hindu	1	1.3
Marital Status		
Married	75	98.7
Divorced	1	1.3
Educational Background		
SPM (O level)	25	32.9
STPM (A level)	6	7.9
Vocational Certificate	4	5.3
Diploma	22	28.9
Degree	19	25.0
Number of Children		
One	26	34.2
Two	24	31.6
Three and more	25	32.9
Other dependents living with respondents		
Yes	18	23.7
No	58	76.3

Source: fieldwork

This study is initially to identify the fundamental issues and problems facing by married working women in managing their work-life balance and to elicit their opinion on the supporting infrastructure, social support and services needed to help them to alleviate their problem and to improve the work-life balance. The answers gathered from the study are used to formulate the basic work-life balance model.

Study Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a set of questionnaires for primary data collection. The questionnaires are self-generated by researchers based on surveys from previous studies. The validity and reliability of the questions in this questionnaire form have been tested. The questionnaires consist of open-ended as well as private questions. It is organized in 4 sections of A, B, C, and D. The details of each section are as follows:

Section A: Respondent's Profile

Section A consists of questions related to respondent's profile, respondent's family profile, and respondent's job profile. Respondent's profile include age, race, religion, marital status, place of birth, and their academic qualification. The family profile is aimed at obtaining information of their spouse's employment such as the job sector and monthly income. Family profile questions also include respondent's responsibilities in taking care of their children, parents, or other dependents and the need of maid services. Respondents are also asked to select their main routine as well as their spouse's from the list of household chores and main expenses. For questions related to the work profile, respondents are asked about their job, monthly income, the needs of outstation, and distance to working place.

Section B: Family and Work Environment

Section B involves several questions on family and work environment faced by respondents. Questions in this section are answered based on likert scale. Respondents are asked to evaluate each of the situation based on 5 likert scales of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=less agreeable, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. All of the statements in family environment consist of 4 aspects which are children/husband management, household management, quality time with family, and emotion. While statements in work environment also consist of 4 aspects including the period of working hour, workload, working pressure, as well as social support and emotion.

Section C: Family and Work Balance

Section C consist of questions regarding the respondent's ability to balance their family and work as well as the activities carried out to achieve balance in their lives.

Section D: The Needs of Social Support Services and Infrastructure

The last section, Section D involves questions regarding the social support services and infrastructure needed to achieve a better quality of work-life balance. The type of social support being questioned are based on the support from employers, families, partners and support groups. Questions related to social support from employers includes the types of incentives and support involving 'leave policies', 'dependent care centers', 'working hours', and 'support and information services.' Respondents are also asked about the level of satisfaction with support services provided as well as suggestions on improvements that could help them balance between their family life and career. This section also covers social support from respondent's family and acquaintance as well as spiritual activities that help in reducing stress.

Literature Reviews

To become a high-income country by 2020, Malaysia has succeeded in its efforts to develop human capitals through its numerous approaches in policies and plans. The Malaysian government adopts the holistic strategy and approaches with emphasizing the development of human capital in The Tenth and Eleventh Malaysia Plan. The strategy is essential to generate and sustain the country's economic growth as well as to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of the people. The government has implemented various education plans to improve the quality of human capital such as the Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013-2025 (Preschool Education to the Secondary Education), Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2015-2025 (Higher Education), and Talent Roadmap 2020. The agenda to produce knowledgeable, skilled and positive human capital is continued through the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (11MP), focusing on four following areas:

1. Improving the labour market efficiency to increase economic growth.
2. Transforming the Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) to meet industry demand.
3. Strengthening lifelong learning for skill upgrades.
4. Improving the quality of the education system for the enhancement of students' outcomes and institutional excellence.

The improvements in labour productivity can reduce the country's dependency on low-skilled foreign workers due to the shift from labour-intensive economic activities to knowledge-based and innovation economies.

The government of Malaysia has taken several initiatives to increase the efficiency of human capital in Malaysia. Among them is to promote TVET-related skills by providing vocational schools and community colleges and institutes for the school leavers. This is because almost 60 percent of the future jobs are expected to require TVET-related skills (Economic Planning Unit, 2015). The opportunities are not only limited to the boys. This means that in future there would be more women in the labour force with the TVET-related skills which requires women with family to have work-life balance. In addition, the aspiration of the Malaysian government to get the source of labour from within Malaysia which excels in various fields can be implemented if every generation comes from an excellent home management that from work-life balanced families.

In Malaysia, has produced more than 60 percent female graduates throughout the years. Unfortunately, the number of these female graduates is a lot less than male graduates in the labour force (Khazanah Research Institute, 2018). It was reported by Bernama (2018) that about 4.4 million women are outside the labour force as compared to 2.2 million men. The participation rate of women in labour force in Malaysia is improving with 45.5 percent in 2010 to 53.5 percent in 2017 (Khazanah Research Institute, 2018).

The increasing number of women in the labour market requires women with family to balance their work and responsibilities which can lead to stress in order to meet both. Many working women face conflicts to meet their responsibilities for family and work. A study reveals that due to lack of family-friendly policies at their companies, gender discrimination and stereotyping, 67 percent of women professionals wanted to quit their jobs (Moster.com, 2019). Many women choose to stay home or to quit working when they face work-family conflict (Hassan, Abdullah & Ismail, 2017).

Malaysia has set its milestone to become a high-income country by 2024. Data shows that ranked as third wealthiest country in South East Asia after Singapore and Brunei with USD10620 per capita income, Malaysia would be able to achieve the target as planned (World Bank, 2017). With USD10620 per capita income, Malaysia needs to plan and strategized its achievement to meet the gross national income per capita of USD12376 or more as defined by the World Bank as a high-income country (World Bank, 2018). One of the efforts to increase and sustain the per capita income of the country, Malaysia needs

to improve the employment rate especially encourages more well-educated women to be in the labour force.

Work-life Balance

Work-life balance became an issue in individual life after the industrial revolution when people have to spend more time in factories than to stay at home with their families. Other issues related to work-life balance are work-family balance and work-life conflict and so on. These issues can be experienced by both male and female workers with long working hours at their work-places or have to continue working at home after office hours. Pressure for work has become more intensified in the modern world with the advent of advance information technology promoting office works can be accomplished on-line and demanding speed for response. In most cases, most of the office works are continued at home which has affected the quality of work-life balance.

Work-life balance can be defined in several perspectives. One perspective is the ability to maintain a minimum role conflict on management of multiple domains of housework, personal and family time and work (Delina & Raya, 2013). Another perspective of work-life balance is ability to balance-up both time and energy in both professional and personal life without too much stress and pressure. Those with work-life balance usually happy, efficient and productive both personally and professionally. A study by Thevanes & Mangaleswaran (2018) discovered that work-life balance is pivotal in determining job performance of an individual and there is a positive relationship between work-life balance and job performance.

There are also various domains suggested for work-life balance. Delina & Raya (2013) stated that there are at least four domains to determine work-life balance; work, family, self and other activities. Whereas, Byrne (2005) suggested eight important domains for work-life balance. That are work, finances, spiritual, hobbies, self, social, family and health. According to Byrne, all these eight domains of life are important and have to be balanced in order to achieve work-life balance. Reddy, Vranda, Ahmed and Siddaramu (2010) stress that the variables influencing work-life balance among married women employees are the multiple roles performed by women, role strain due to the multiple roles, organizational culture and work dynamic, personal resources and social support, career orientation and career stage and coping and coping strategies.

As mentioned earlier, work-life conflict and work-family conflict have forced many women choose to quit their jobs and stay at home to look after their families. Das &

Kushwaha (2013) outlined the following five factors contribute to imbalance in work-life; workplace support facilities, social commitment, workplace situation, workplace support, work context, issues relating to specific situations and assistance programmes from employers. This means that if issues related to above factors can be overcome and facilities, programmes and services needed to ease various problems faced by working women, they would not be forced many women to leave their jobs.

Work-life Balance Models

Several models related to work-life balance are introduced by several researchers. However, the models are not focusing on to fulfill the needs of married women to improve their efficiency and productivity and also to keep them in the labour force. For example, Tariq, Aslam, Siddique & Tanveer (2012), discuss on work-life balance Model (win-win situation tool for the employees and organizations). The model was constructed based on studies by various experts in the work-life model field. However, most of the models are more on promoting work-life balance for workers or individuals to be effective or productive at the employment sector and carried out on different group of respondents (Swathi & Mohapatra, 2017, Syed Mohammad & Akhtar, 2014, Adkins & Premeaux, 2019)

Discussion on the Model

Findings from this study has facilitated the formulation of basic work-life balance model for working women especially those who work in public sector. Basically, there are two main contributing factors effecting work-life balance of working women in public sector, family environment (family related factors) and work environment (job-related factors). The other contributing factors to enhance work-life balance are incentives and services needed by working women to facilitate women to work and manage their family conveniently.

Family Environment (Family Related Factors)

Four main factors are identified from the study; children/husband management, household management, quality time with family and emotion. The family related factors include managing the needs of children and husband and also housework. These include preparing food, clothes and other needs, ensuring comfortable and conducive living environment to the household members. Among the works are doing laundry, cleaning dishes, inside and area surrounding the house. Buying groceries and other needs. Ensure children able to go and come back from school safely and also have proper care after school.

In addition to that a working woman needs to ensure that she has quality times to spend with her household members. This can be spending time with children talking and assisting them with their school work, have recreational activities, gardening with family members and have family vacation. Another important factor is a working woman should receive emotional support from her family members especially her spouse.

Work Environment (Job-related Factors)

Being able to work only in a specified time is very much appreciated by most working women. Suitable work load and minimal negative work pressure also important. This means that the suitable work load enable women to complete their work with good quality during working hours. This would also enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work management and work satisfaction. Lastly, good and quality social and emotional support from the office management is vital to motivate women to be productive and effective in their work.

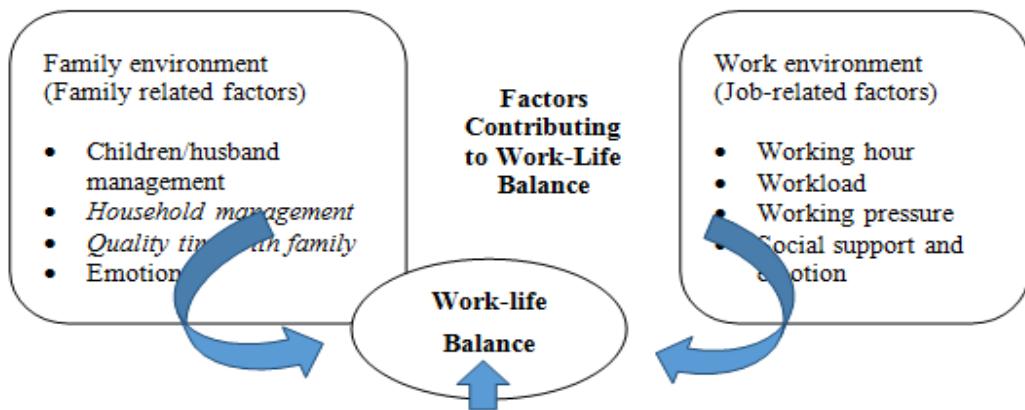


Figure 1 The Basic Work-Life Balance Models for Working Women

Incentives and Services Needed by Working Women

Leave policies	Dependent care centers		Working hours	Support and information services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Medical leave -Maternal leave -Personal leave -Medical leave for family -Miscarriage leave -Emergency leave -Leave for family death case -Long term leave for specific purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Child care center 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Flexible working hours -Permission for "coming late" or "go home early" for some reason -Permission to "out of office" during working hours for some important family affairs -Flexible break time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organizing family day -Counseling service and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) -Nursery room -Seminar, workshop, and family training on balancing work and family life -religious talks and classes

Incentives and Services Needed by Working Women to Enhance their Work-Life Balance

Leave Policies

The leaves include medical related leaves such as personal medical, maternal, miscarriage, and special leaves to care sick family members. Other leaves include suitable amount of annual leave, emergency leave, special leave for a death of close family member and long-term leave facility for a specific purpose permissible by the management.

Dependent Care Centre

The most needed care centre is child care centre. Many have suggested that ideally, a child care centre should be made available in every office building. It is very convenience for the parent to drop and fetch their children at their own work places. The setting is most convenient to breast feeding mothers.

Working Hours

Flexible working hours is also suggested as essential to enable women to manage work-life balance better. Women can choose their working hour cohort suitable to their household needs which would enhance their livelihoods. The facility is also to enable women to manage the housework that need urgent attention and then go to work and focus on their work.

Another facility suggested is permission to come to office late or leave the office early. This facility is only for unavoidable occasions or cases whether it is personal or family affairs. Sometimes a parent has to attend parent-teacher meetings, send parents or children to medical check-up routine and so on.

Another facility is to be able to be out of office for a few hours for the above purposes. Lastly, it would be more conducive if in certain situation or circumstances, the staff is allowed to have flexible break time.

Support and Information Services and Activities

Annual or biannual family day is suggested to be organized by the employer. In addition, related government and non-government agencies should provide counselling services and employment assistance Programme (EAP) to provide overcome problems related to work and family conflict.

Occasional talks, seminars, workshop and training related to enhance work-life balance should be organized. This also include occasional talks, classes and workshops on work-life balance and its coping mechanism from religious perspective.

Conclusion

The above factors, criteria and suggestions that form a basic model for work-life balance are based on the findings from our study. These are the suggestions and feedbacks by the respondents from the interviews and surveys that the respondents consider as important services and facilities that would enhance the work-life balance of the respondents. In addition, the model also provides factors related family and job-related factors that would have a great impact on work-life balance of working women if not been properly managed. The model can be enhanced in future by having larger samples from various groups of employment sectors and levels. In the long run, a comprehensive work-life model could be formulated that can benefit to a larger group of married women across the nation. This would also encourage more women to join the labour force and become effective and productive labour force that would enhance productivity and economic achievement of the nation.

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