



## Challenges Faced by Women Leaders and Mothers Who Are Pursuing Higher Education in maintaining their Work-Life balance

Marina Memon<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Asad Abbas Rizvi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MS Education Scholar, Department of Education, The Begum Nusrat Bhutto Women University, Sukkur.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Email: [drasad.rizvi@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:drasad.rizvi@iiu.edu.pk)

| ARTICLE INFO                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Submission:</b><br/>July 24, 2026</p> <p><b>Revised:</b><br/>August 15, 2026</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b><br/>September 03, 2026</p> <p><b>Available Online:</b><br/>September 19, 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Women leaders, Single Mothers, Higher Education, Student Parents, Work-Life Balance Challenges, Phenomenology</p> <p><b>Corresponding author:</b><br/><b>Dr. Asad Abbas Rizvi</b><br/><b>Email:</b><br/><a href="mailto:drasad.rizvi@iiu.edu.pk">drasad.rizvi@iiu.edu.pk</a></p> | <p>This study aims to explore single mothers' academic challenges in balancing career and motherhood. This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of challenges faced by single mothers pursuing higher education in Sindh province. Using purposive sampling, five single mother students currently enrolled in higher education institutions were selected to share their experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. According to the results, single mothers in higher education frequently face significant challenges of work-life balance, which may increase risks to both their own well-being and that of their children. It was also found that the mothers felt challenges by parenting their children instead of their academic responsibilities. Moreover, the study found that limited infrastructure of the institutions and financial hardship also affects student health and their study. Besides all these challenges, support from society and peers also plays an important role in helping single mothers to face these challenges. It was concluded that all educational institutions, student welfare institutions, and social agencies should follow those strategies which support and help single mothers to understand their children's needs.</p> |

### Introduction

It is important for each professional individual to maintain balance between personal life and professional life, especially for university-going individuals. By maintaining balance between personal and professional life, an individual can perform their tasks more effectively, and it also helps to deal with personal life hurdles efficiently (Sajid et al., 2022). It is difficult to maintain balance between personal and professional life for women, as they have to do both professional and household tasks.

Particularly in traditional societies, women are only considered to perform their household work, so that is why they face challenges in maintaining balance between them. This affects their professional performance and influences their personal life (Rofcanin et al., 2022). Work-life balance refers to maintaining balance between professional and personal life. It is important, especially for university teachers, because they have to deal with research, student supervision, administrative duties, and the role of teaching. Sometimes teachers have to perform these tasks beyond their working hours, which creates pressure on teachers (Sabagh, 2022).

Studies at global level show that it becomes difficult for university teachers to maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. The main cause is research expectations and public pressure. In universities in Europe and North America, teachers

also experience pressure to perform tasks. As in many universities, teachers have to maintain balance due to the pressure of research funding, research publications, and administrative responsibilities (Sabagh, 2022).

Cultural expectations in South Asia lead to great hurdles for women to maintain balance between their personal and professional lives. Women are expected to fulfill their household tasks effectively along with their jobs. Studies show that the professional and personal duties of women in Pakistan and neighboring countries affect their mental and physical health (Raza, 2023). Although the participation of females is increasing in universities of Pakistan, they have to face problems in maintaining balance between professional and personal life. To address these problems, it is necessary to understand how to deal with them and which kind of strategies and policies an institution should follow.

Work-life balance has become the greatest challenge. University teachers have to work for a long time; they have a heavy workload, and they also have to deal with their household tasks and fulfill their family responsibilities. Studies conducted in America show that working long hours, the uneven division of household tasks, and taking care of children cause hurdles for women to maintain balance in their professional and personal lives (Sabagh, 2022).

In South Asia, traditional gender roles and marital status play an important role in work-life balance. In simple terms, after marriage, women are expected to perform household duties effectively and also continue their jobs, which causes a burden for them. Studies conducted in India indicate that the overload of work, rigid rules of institutions, and less support from the institutions cause challenges for women to maintain balance in their professional and personal life. Likewise, study conducted by Bashir and Khan (2022) show that women feel uncomfortable maintaining balance between their professional and personal life.

In the Pakistani context, Raza (2023) found that the responsibilities of work and home affect the mental health of women. Sometimes these cause permanent health or mental issues. Besides social factors and personal life, the institutional culture also causes challenges in maintaining balance in professional and personal life. Commonly, it is considered that females working in the public sector have more flexibility than in the private sector.

Teachers also have to perform additional tasks like supervision, research, teaching, and administrative duties. Performing these additional tasks also causes challenges in maintaining balance in professional and personal life. The widespread use of online platforms also increases academic responsibilities. All those responsibilities affect teachers' health mentally and physically. Previous studies have indicated that the lack of work-life balance also causes health issues, stress, and marital conflicts (Kinman, 2019).

Women academics who are also mothers often face additional pressures due to societal expectations regarding childcare and household management. It is suggested that academic mothers frequently experience role conflict as they attempt to fulfill both professional and family obligations simultaneously, which can negatively affect their career progression, well-being, and work performance (Hosseini, 2024).

In developing countries like Pakistan, the awareness and implementation of work-life balance practices remain limited. Work-life balance is often considered a luxury rather than a necessity, and organizational support systems are still evolving. According to global work-life balance rankings, Pakistan performs relatively low compared to many other countries, highlighting the need for greater attention to employee well-being and workplace flexibility (Tabassum et al., 2024). The absence of comprehensive policies and the prevalence of long working hours make it difficult for employees to effectively manage both professional and personal responsibilities.

### **Rationale Of The Study**

Balancing professional responsibilities and family life has become an increasingly significant challenge in contemporary societies, particularly for working mothers employed in higher education institutions. Academic careers often involve demanding responsibilities such as teaching, research, administrative duties, and continuous professional development. These expectations frequently require extended working hours and high productivity, which can make it difficult for mothers to manage both their professional roles and family responsibilities effectively. Consequently, maintaining work-life balance is a major challenge for mothers working in higher education, as the pressure to perform multiple roles may lead to stress, fatigue, and reduced well-being (Kelling, 2024)

Furthermore, according to the literature, female academicians often face additional societal expectations related to motherhood and household responsibilities. In many contexts, including developing countries, mothers are expected to manage childcare, household tasks, and emotional support for their families alongside their careers. Such expectations increase the burden on working

mothers and can negatively affect their job satisfaction, career progression, and personal well-being. Understanding these challenges is therefore essential for developing institutional policies that support flexible working arrangements, parental support systems, and gender-inclusive workplace practices in higher education institutions.

### **Significance Of The Study**

In the context of higher education, female academics and working mothers often face additional challenges such as long working hours, research productivity pressures, career advancement expectations, and limited institutional support. These factors can create role conflict and affect both professional performance and family life. Scholars emphasize that the lack of flexible work arrangements, childcare support, and gender-sensitive policies can further intensify work-life imbalance among women in academia (Hosseini, 2024). Therefore, understanding the challenges faced by working mothers in higher education is important for designing effective institutional strategies that promote gender equality and work-life integration.

In Pakistan, although the participation of women in higher education institutions has gradually increased, there remains limited research focusing specifically on the work-life balance of working mothers in academia. Cultural expectations, family responsibilities, and workplace demand often create additional pressures for Pakistani women, making it difficult for them to maintain a balance between professional and domestic roles. Existing literature suggests that Pakistani working women frequently experience role overload and limited organizational support, which affects their career progression and personal well-being (Iqbal, 2024). Hence, examining the work-life balance of working mothers in higher education is crucial to better understand their experiences and challenges.

### **Research Objective**

- To explore work-life balance challenges faced by single mother students in Sindh?

### **Literature Review**

Work-life balance is increasing as both employees and employers are increasingly aware of it. However, most of the work remains centered on certain sectors. Work-life balance is important for both employees and companies, as noted by Menka (2020). Employees keep a balance between their personal life, professional job life, and family responsibilities on their shoulders, referred to as "work-life balance." The findings of the study indicate that those who do not keep a positive balance between their financial, personal, and professional circles also have an impact on the dreams they work for.

In the view of Minocha (2025), culture and environment play an important role in work life, where productivity and equality have a positive impact on work life. Organizations should revisit, on a regular basis, the practices being employed to identify causes of employee dissatisfaction, stress, as well as job inefficiencies. The concerns of working women and work-life balance have also found their way into contemporary literature on work-life balance.

Social pressure and stress impact working women globally; the result is extreme pressure on women's personal and professional lives to fulfill household responsibilities and achieve higher education dreams. Work-life balance is the most difficult challenge faced by women in maintaining a positive balance. It has an impact on their social, professional, personal, emotional, and physical health. Therefore, a good quality of life for working women requires attaining good work-life balance.

Working women manage both roles and accomplish their goals individually (Khanna et al., 2024). It is also investigated that professional and family roles are different across nations; the conclusion drawn from his study cannot be generalized to other nations. The literature highlights that work-life balance is cultural, not universal; therefore, an analysis of working women in other nations to manage work-life balance is necessary to see the difficulties they face.

The work-life balance is becoming increasingly popular in the IT industry (Shah et al. 2025). It is a conflict between family and the workplace that can negatively impact family life. This will reduce life satisfaction and increase internal conflict. Work-family conflict experiences have many aspects, including age, family size, number and age of children, working hours and social support. Given the connection between work-life equilibrium and performance and sense of job fulfillment of an employee, it highlighted the need to develop organizational guidelines for managing work-life balance. This research highlighted an enhanced comprehension of the work-life equilibrium experienced by female professionals in IT. A sense of equilibrium in an employee is strongly impacted by their frame of mind regarding the job, family, and time-off framework (Paudel et al. 2024)

Work-life balance is like an unachievable ideal. Keeping a positive balance between personal responsibilities and professional lives is asserted in the women's workplace, where they put all their efforts into what they do. Managing jobs and families in a contented manner can be a challenge in today's "do more with less" 21<sup>st</sup> century. Work-life balance is becoming a popular topic worldwide because people navigate personal and professional duties on their shoulders.

It concerns both individuals and companies. Job autonomy, Organizational commitment, and perceived work are major factors in an employee's sense of balance, according to a composite and sector-wise regression analysis. The Researchers are searching for a workplace that can support them in managing their many responsibilities. It would improve a person's work-life balance, both personal and professional, and has a knock-on impact on dedication and low attrition rates.

The phrase "work-life balance" highlights how well an employee manages and balances their financial, personal, and professional life spheres. A good, healthy life is necessary for women working in the current environment, where they face many challenges in personal and professional life, including at home and at the office. Working women have more challenges than working men. Moreover, it has been found that people encounter conflict more frequently because of work-related issues that overlap with personal lives than personal issues, including insufficient personal time and the obligation to meet others' expectations; owing to the required overtime, the majority of workers face many issues. Working women not only compromise in one environment but also have to adapt to conventions and meet the demands in each one (Khanna et al., 2024)

The literature also suggests maintaining a healthy balance between work life, personal life and professional life that has positive impacts for working women. To help working women overcome the challenges of work-life balance, two work-life balance models, namely role analysis and three-factor models, have been devised. With the help of these models, women can achieve higher careers and a better balance and improve their health, happiness, and all aspects of their lives.

### Data Presentation

In the following table, the Profile of Respondents, who participated in the study is given.

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents who Participated in the Study (N=5)**

| Respondents            | Age      | Status    | Education | No of Children | Income Source   | City      |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Single-Mother Students | 20 to 30 | Divorced  | Bachelors | 1              | Family          | Hyderabad |
|                        | 20 to 30 | Divorced  | Masters   | 1              | Self-employment | Khairpur  |
|                        | 20 to 30 | Divorced  | Masters   | 1              | Family          | Sukkur    |
|                        | 30 to 40 | Separated | Masters   | 2              | Self-employment | Shikarpur |
|                        | 30 to 40 | Widow     | PhD       | 1              | Family          | Hyderabad |

### Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used with a phenomenological research design to understand the challenges of single mother students through semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The population for this study were those students who are single mothers and enrolled in all Sindh universities within the higher education system in Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select 5 participants (Patton, 2015). This study intends to include those single mothers who were not living with a supportive partner and live with their parents, laws, relatives, or with their kids. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

### Findings

According to the thematic analysis of the current study, women academics had to perform multiple duties. They were responsible for teaching the classes, as well as performing many administrative tasks. Also, they had to supervise curricular activities in their institutions. That is how the multitasking of women made it hard for them to manage their duties at home as well as at their workplace. At the same time, it was evident that an academic career at higher educational institutions demanded excellence in teaching and growth in research. Women academics were also responsible for managing certain tasks, including administrative tasks and co-curricular activities. These multiple tasks made the daily routine of women more difficult. Hence, findings showed

that multitasking was the major issue for female university teachers according to the current study. The following themes emerged from analysis of interviews:

Women academics' responsibilities at workplace was the extracted theme which is based on the tasks or duties that female academics had to perform in their universities. Within the current theme, three categories of tasks were derived: Management tasks, teaching on campus, and research activities. Also, the nature of duties varied from department to department. According to management tasks, female academics had to perform different administrative duties because many higher authorities or heads of the department prefer to give administrative duties to female staff members. R 7 said, "I just dislike being the in-charge tours because these duties add to my work burden and make my daily routine tough." R 1 reported, "I get irritated when I have to spend extra time in the university, just to perform duties in co-curricular activities". R5 argued, "Director (head of department) prefers to give administrative duties to female teachers because they try to complete that task with utmost dedication. But females are not rewarded or even appreciated for these duties at any forum in the university." Some academics who belonged to science disciplines had to take care of the labs, which was a hectic duty for them. They had to maintain the lab, manage the lab stock and staff other than teaching and research.

## **Conclusion**

It was concluded that single mothers face a lot of challenges in maintaining their work-life balance. They face a lot of issues at their workplace due to being single mothers, including financial issues, work timings, and workdays, family issues, childcare, reactions of peers and social taboos.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that

1. Develop a baby care center in each university for single mother students.
2. Single mothers may provide more psychological and financial support to carry out their routine studies with total peace of mind.
3. Society should encourage males to marry these women also so that they have strong support from their own house.

## **References**

1. Bashir, S., & Khan, M.I. (2022). Challenges of work-life balance for women academics: A case study of universities in Lahore, Pakistan *UMT Education Review*, 5(2), 1-21.
2. Hosseini, Z., Rahimi, S. F., Salmani, F., Miri, M. R., & Aghamolaei, T. (2024). Etiology, consequences, and solutions of working women's work-life conflict: A systematic review. *BMC Women's Health*, 24, 62. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02873-4>
3. Iqbal, Z. (2024). Work life balance is an illusion: Exploring the challenges faced by Pakistani working women. (2024). *UCP Journal of Mass Communication*, 2(2), 26-51.
4. Kelling, A. S., Bartsch, R. A., Walther, C. A., Lucas, A., & Santiago-Vázquez, L. Z. (2024). Work-life balance of academic parents: Expectations and experiences of mothers and fathers. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 16(5), 1614-1626.
5. Khanna, R., Singh, R., & Jain, H. (2024). Work life balance among working women. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, 4(2), 1587-1593.
6. Kinman, G. (2019). Sickness presenteeism at work: Prevalence, costs and management. *British Journal of Management*. 129(1):69-78. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/ldyo43>
7. Kinman, G., & Johnson, S. (2019). Special section on well-being in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/stro000131>
8. Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009) *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. 2nd Edition, Sage, London.

9. Minocha, A., Lakhera, G., Patra, B. C., Bhatia, S., & Singh, R. K. (2025). Impact of quality of work life and job satisfaction on organizational commitment among academicians. *International Journal of Business Process Integration and Management*, 12(2), 149–163.
10. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & research methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications
11. Paudel, R., Kunwar, V., Ahmed, M. F., & Yedgarian, V. (2024). Work-life equilibrium: Key to enhancing employee job satisfaction. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(7), 1146–1159.
12. Raza, M. F. (2023). *An examination of the relation between acculturation and religion among South Asian Muslim Americans* [Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University].
13. Rofcanin, Y., Las Heras, M., Bosch, M. J., Wood, G., & Mughal, F. (2019). A closer look at the positive crossover between supervisors and subordinates: The role of home and work engagement. *Human Relations*, 72(11), 1776-1804. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718812599>
14. Sabagh, Z., Hall, N. C., & Saroyan, A. (2022). Antecedents, correlates and consequences of faculty burnout. *Educational Research*, 60(5), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2018.1461573>
15. Sajid, S.M., Jamil, M., & Abbas, M. (2022). Impact of teachers' work-family conflict on the performance of their children. *Jahan-e-Tehqeeq*, 5(1), 229-239. <https://jahan-e-tahqeeq.com/index.php/jahan-e-tahqeeq/article/view/468>
16. Shah, C., Raval, A., Bhatia, M., & Thanki, S. (2025). Work-Life Balance Among Working Women: A Study with reference to service industry. *NMIMS Management Review*, 33(1), 55-64.
17. Tabassum, R., Kashif, M. F. & Jamil, M. (2024). Impact of mental health & well- being on academic performance of university students. *Journal of Social Research Development*, 5(3), 37-48. <https://doi.org/10.53664/JSRD/05-03-2024-04-37-48>



2026 by the authors; Journal of Global Social Transformation (JGST). This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).