

Juggling Work and Family Life: Developing a Framework for Women Entrepreneurs in Malaysia

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Abstract: In today's market place there are many dual-income families involving women entrepreneurs that experience the impacts of Work-Family Conflict (WFC) which presents both positive and negative consequences to women entrepreneurs especially towards their jobs. Hence, women entrepreneurs have to strike a delicate balance between career and family to sustain their businesses and deal with rising implications in society. This study presents a proposed framework primarily based on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, illustrating how certain identified predictors can contribute to the current knowledge of Malaysian women entrepreneurs, with particular reference to WFC. The proposed framework of this study will give new significant insights to the parties involved (i.e., policy makers, ministries and agencies, academicians and women entrepreneurs) on the human capital and business development in Malaysia and serves as a reference point for literature and theoretical development in future. It will also helps the government to achieve the key strategic objectives of 11th Malaysia plan by providing recommendations to assist all levels of women in their career developments, enabling Malaysia to emerge as a high-income nation by 2020.

Key words: Spousal support, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, job performance, entrepreneurs

INTRODUCTION

Generally, people now a days are striving for work-life balance in order to achieve a successful career and better living lifestyles. This scenario is applicable to women entrepreneurs as well. Entrepreneurs remarkably are struggling to balance their business and personal stuff in order to survive and reach their entrepreneurial goals. They play multiple roles as spouse, parent and employer simultaneously to perform their research and family responsibilities. They are among the groups that tend to experience higher WFC compared to the employees (Konig and Cesinger, 2015). This has become a challenge that they currently face as women put heavy commitment to their research which is working longer hours and more likely to suffer from greater average levels of stress, compared to employees (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1996; Volery and Pullich, 2010) and their life even in a high risk and uncertainty. Besides, entrepreneurs themselves have such belief that they ought to work 70-100 h/week to ensure that they can gain a fruitful business. This phenomenon happened in Malaysia itself as there are numerous of women entrepreneurs who are overworked each week. Malaysian labour force survey report (2011) stated that women entrepreneurs spend an average of 50.2 h on work per week compared to <50 h spent by the

employees. Yet, the same women need to perform household chores and children back at home (Teoh and Chong, 2014). As a result, women entrepreneurs feel stress due to time pressure on both home and business demands.

According to Shelton (2006)'s studies, women entrepreneurs could not reach and maintain optimal performance in their businesses during the difficulties in managing WFC stresses. The WFC in turn may have great impacts on individual success. Due to the fact, emotional (e.g., listening to them when they've had bad mood) and instrumental support (e.g., preparing meals when they are busy in business) from spouse is needed to reduce time pressure and parental demand that causes WFC (Nasurudin and ODriscoll, 2012). This support is particularly vital at entrepreneur's start-up stage which has direct effect towards their performance on business growth. However, lack of spousal support is the unique problem that entrepreneurs, especially Malaysian women entrepreneurs faced today. Due to cultural norms, women in Malaysia are prone to be conservative and their core responsibility is mainly concern on family matters (i.e., looking after children and performing household duties) while at the same time ensuring that her business to be financially successful. In addition, the number of childcare facilities are scarce and overburden to Malaysians. Only 3,712 of childcare centres were

established in nationwide which is still quite a distance from the government target of 13,200 childcare centres by 2020 envisaged under the government transformation programme. This eventually had increasingly detracted women entrepreneurs from satisfaction as business owners (Teoh and Chong, 2014) where they have to rely on family members, relatives and maid to large and heavy family responsibilities (Hundera, 2014).

Research in the 'work-family' arena is therefore needed stemming from the realization that an unbalanced work-family relationship causes huge impacts toward an individual (Kalliath and Brough, 2008) particular to women entrepreneurs. WFC of women entrepreneurs has only recently become an important topic in debates involving policy and academia. Nevertheless, rigorous and in-depth research highlighting the issues of women entrepreneurs towards WFC is relatively sparse, especially in Malaysian context, despite their increasing presence in the workforce. Most of the studies are conducted primarily in developed countries like Singapore, China and United States (Leaptrott, 2009; Shelton, 2006) and Canada (Ferguson and Durup, 1998). Apart from this, studies focus on women entrepreneur's individual performance and job satisfaction has not been adequately explored. Most of the previous research conducted were emphasised particularly on employees (Roth and David, 2009; Witt and Carlson, 2006) instead of women entrepreneurs (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2006).

WFC is no longer primarily seen as women entrepreneur's problem itself but it has becoming a societal problem in our nation. Therefore, there is an urgent need to propose a framework to fill the gaps occurred on managing work-family conflict and job performance of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia. A study of this interaction is therefore, essential in helping to understand how individuals react to and deal with the overlapping domains of work and family which have vital consequences not just for the affected individuals but inadvertently, the nation of Malaysia as a whole.

Literature review

Work-family conflict: WFC refers to "a type of inter-role conflict in which involvement in work roles interfere with involvement in family roles" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). In general, work-family conflict occurs when individual's job activities and professional career are mutually incompatible with her family activities in some respect (Carlson *et al.*, 2010; Kalliath *et al.*, 2012). Consistent with the findings gathered from previous researchers (Naithani, 2010; Yavas *et al.*, 2008), WFC has a negative influences on individual's job performance.

Women entrepreneurs with high demands in work and family are facing greater WFC compared to the male counterparts (Das, 2000) and eventually affect their performance and career satisfaction.

Ogbogu has elucidated that women who experienced higher level of WFC would underperform in their work. In other words, women entrepreneurs who juggled between business and family might not perform well. It has become a challenge for them to perform while they are competing work demands at business and family needs at home (Teoh and Chong, 2014). Karatepe and Kilic (2007) also revealed in their analysis that there is a reverse relationship between job performance and their WFC levels among employees. However, mixed results have been explored. Based on previous study (Karatepe and Kilic, 2009; Dyne *et al.*, 2002), it showed the evidence that people who are experience higher level of stress in work and family tends to prosper in their job performance. This is due to WFC concepts are not being mutually exclusive with different level of strains (Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996) that caused the spillover effects has various impacts on an outcome. On the other hand, Bhuian *et al.* (2005) found no significant relationship between WFC and job performance a finding similarly corroborated by Karatepe and Bekteshi (2008) and Wang and Tsai (2014).

It has been found that WFC creates negative impacts to individuals (Anafarta, 2011; Carlson *et al.*, 2010). Individuals who feel dissatisfied with their work are more likely not to make any expectation towards their job (Kim *et al.*, 2005, 2009; Lambert *et al.*, 2006; Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996). Many scholars agreed that there is an increasingly adverse relationship between WFC and job satisfaction of individuals (Burke and Elkot, 2010) a fact equally applicable to women entrepreneurs. This statement also corroborated by an analysis done by Greenhaus *et al.* (2006) and Patel *et al.* (2008) that showed WFC diminished with the higher levels of job satisfaction. With regard to WFC, Work Interference with Family (WIF) was more strongly related to job satisfaction. As such the hypotheses are derived as follows:

- H₁: there is a negative relationship between WFC and job performance
- H₂: there is a negative relationship between WFC and job satisfaction

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Spousal support: Spouse is the major asset for the women entrepreneurs as the support network. Support extended to entrepreneurs can be emotional or instrumental

(Omar, 2015; Bodenmann *et al.*, 2006; Lapierre and Allen, 2006). Emotional support seems to be even more crucial than the relief from household responsibilities (Vadnjal and Vadnjal, 2013) since it helps to reduce conflicts tremendously. Instrumental support is the provision of actual assistance to complete or at least help in task accomplishment and can at least reduce the pressures pertaining to time and also parental demands.

According to COR theory, individuals are motivated to acquire, maintain and preserve resources which they value such as the social support while coping with stress (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001). This is supported by Lee and Choo's model where they assimilated that spousal support has a positive effect towards work-family conflict of women entrepreneurs.

Spousal support is found to have inverse relationship on WFC (Patel *et al.*, 2008; Schieman *et al.*, 2009; Voydanoff, 2004) in other words, entrepreneurs experience less WFC if their spouse are giving help and support to reduce time pressure and parental demand they faced at home. Hence, spouse support plays a vital role and views as an important factor that having significant relationships toward WFC, thereby developing a positive energy and increase satisfaction level at work of entrepreneurs. In short, individual who is lack of support from spouse can unwittingly invite WFC (Sanberg, 2013; Wayne *et al.*, 2013). Spousal support may indirectly help individuals to reduce WFC but may not lessen the work role demands directly (Selvarajan *et al.*, 2013). This may lead to job dissatisfaction if there is lower spousal support been given to an individual (Patel *et al.*, 2008). In this context, husbands must giving encouragement to their wives working as entrepreneurs in order to raise their confidence and satisfaction towards their business. Without a fair understanding of the nature of spousal support in business ventures, adequate support cannot be provided to an entrepreneur especially to women entrepreneurs. Based on these literature, the following hypotheses are developed:

- H₃: there is a negative relationship between spousal support and WFC
- H₄: there is a positive relationship between spousal support and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction and job performance: Job satisfaction is perceived as an important factor that will improve performance of an individual in her job. In Ayranci (2011)'s study, it has been found that satisfied Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise's (SMEs) business owners are perceived to perform better in their businesses especially when involved decision making tasks. Individuals who

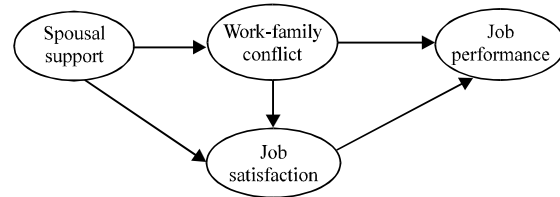


Fig. 1: A proposed research framework on WFC and Job performance of women entrepreneurs in Malaysia

operated her own businesses are far more satisfied with her job compared to employees (Schundeln, 2009; Taylor, 2004) which in turn affect their performance. A study on Chinese family enterprises revealed that job satisfaction and job performance are interrelated positively. In Lieu of the discussion within this study, H₅ is postulated as follows:

- H₅: there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and job performance

Based on the notions discussed in this study, the proposed research framework for this study is presented in Fig. 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several studies have demonstrated that work-life balance is a daunting challenge to many entrepreneurs, particularly so for Malaysian women. Malaysian woman who is expected to manage the home front impeccably while ensuring that her business brings home the bacon. The very act of juggling both research and family can certainly cause her to collide head on with various conflicts and at times, these may pull her in different directions. In most Asian countries, the traditional roles of women are highly emphasised and touted where women are expected to be conservative, prudent and attentive and frowned upon if otherwise (Teoh and Chong, 2014). In a traditional society, these traits research wonders when women confine themselves at home, looking after children and performing household duties considered as their core responsibilities (Orser *et al.*, 2011).

Few studies have been undertaken in the past that assess the women entrepreneurs in the context of work-family conflict and job performance in Malaysia. This study will expanded the body of existing knowledge to include the job performance of women entrepreneurs in strategic, task-related and contextual dimensions, since previous research on entrepreneur's performance focused

mainly on financial aspects. This study will not only enriched work-family theory but also broadened the perspective of women entrepreneurs on their spousal support, job satisfaction and job performance toward WFC. From the results gained by the proposed framework, it helps to shed some light on the ongoing debate over what should be done to assist women entrepreneurs to perform well in their business. This is of great value to a SME-dominated economy such as Malaysia where the study provides a comprehensive research on work-family conflict issue to strengthen women entrepreneurship development.

In terms of practical implications this study will also contribute in helping the government achieve the key strategic objectives of 11th Malaysia Plan by providing recommendations to assist women entrepreneurs in their career development, ultimately aimed at enabling Malaysia to emerge as a high-income nation by 2020. Likewise, it helps to enrich the development of SMEs to gain competitive advantage which will indirectly boost up economic growth and contribute to the social well-being of our nation. With this, the proposed framework can be served as a blueprint for government and other agencies to identify strategic policy making to ease the burden and problems that Malaysian women entrepreneurs faced. By developing this framework this study will help the nation to attract large pool of good foreign and local investments in SMEs and transform SMEs as an engine of growth and innovation since small and medium-scale enterprises are initiated and run by entrepreneurs and these firms constitute 98.5% of business establishments (SME Corp. Malaysia in 2015) and contribute 57.5% to total employment in Malaysia.

At the same time, it also helps to increase the number of high growth and innovative women-owned firms which contribute towards country's GDP. As stated by Vanderbrug, "If women's labour participation rate were closer to that of men, it would contribute \$1 trillion to GDP in emerging economies" which implies that women entrepreneurship is the key driver to this growth opportunity.

Furthermore, the proposed framework will provide insights into how Malaysian women entrepreneurs cope with stressful work and family environments and improve their performance as a whole. In addition, the ministries and agencies could develop better family-friendly policies to improve work-life balance among entrepreneurs such as building childcare centres particularly to women entrepreneurs, organizing enterprise education and professional development courses for potential Malaysian women entrepreneurs.

CONCLUSION

This may be a fruitful avenue for current study to explore the spousal support, job satisfaction and job performance of women entrepreneurs towards WFC in different aspects with various theories to be applied in the model.

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