

CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Subject Studied

The roles that women play are becoming extremely diverse. Besides performing their traditional roles, namely as wives, mothers and homemakers, more women are now engaged in economic activities. The issue of integrating work and family life is a salient issue. A combination of social, economic and demographic forces are pushing more women into the labor force.

Malaysia is undergoing rapid industrialization. Its economy is increasingly concentrated on the manufacturing and services sectors and less on the agriculture sector. The human resource development of women is crucial to a rapidly industrializing nation such as Malaysia.

According to the 2000 Population Census estimates, about 48.9% or 11.4 million of the total population were women. 48% of women were in the working age cohort (15-64 years), making up one third of the labor force.¹ The factors that have led to the increase in the number of women in the work force are improved educational attainments, increased job opportunities as well as delaying marriage and childbirth.

The increased participation of married women in the labor force has various implications. The need to integrate the competing demands of work and family life has created complex and continuing problems for the worker and the employer. In short, incompatible or inconsistent expectations between different roles and the problem of living up to the standards of both, can lead to role conflict.

Women have to juggle the demands arising from the family domain and that of the workplace. Although men may be agreeable to the idea of their wives being career women, many do not equally share in the household tasks. Hence, women still remain primarily responsible for the home and the children. The changes as a result of industrialization and urbanization have not significantly altered this perception regarding their role.

Women can only work if some arrangement has been made regarding the care of their children. With extended families, children may be left with their grand parents or a relative. Since there are more nuclear families now compared to extended families, the choices available to parents are to leave the children in the care of stay-in maids, relatives, babysitters, neighbors or childcare centers. In some cases, children are left on their own at home. According to Tey (1991): *"... the problem of childcare has worsened because of the breakdown of the extended family structure."*²

The article "Feminization of the Workforce" by Sylvia Ann Hewlett³ quoted that a 1989 *New York Times* poll found that 83% of working women in America were torn by the conflicting demands of their jobs and the desire to do a better job with their children. Respondents stated that the single most important problem faced by women today was tension between work and family. Hewlett believed the underlying reason for that was because working mothers continue to bear the central burden of running the home and raising the children.

Apart from the responsibilities related to the home, there are also work-related demands. At the office, there are expectations to be met, as well as relationships between supervisors and colleagues that must be dealt with. In the quest for a meaningful, balanced life, women have had to answer the demands of both the workplace and family.

1.2 Research Statement

With education becoming more accessible to women and training opportunities increasing, more women are able to participate in the various sectors of the economy. The manufacturing sector absorbed 43.4% of women workers in 1995, as compared to 16.3% in 1980. According to the Department of Statistics, the rate of labor force participation of married women rose from 51.2% in 1980 to 58.2% in 1991.⁴ This included married women with preschool-age children and school-age children. As such, these employed married women have to balance the demands of work and family roles.

Teaching in public universities may be viewed by some, to be a less demanding, less strenuous and a more flexible job, as compared to a regular 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. or 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. job. Women academicians, however, have to perform multiple roles - as an employee, spouse and also in some cases, parent.

Many studies document that women spend much more time on housework and childcare than do their spouses (Nyquist, Slivken, Spence & Helmreich, 1985; Levant, Slatterly & Loiselle, 1987; Bielby and Bielby, 1988). Overwork may lead to exhaustion and stress. Work-family conflicts adversely affect an individual; be it in one's capacity as an employee or as a family member.

Work-family conflict was shown to be negatively correlated to levels of job, family and life satisfaction; parenting role; productivity; job performance; and morale (Pleck, 1983; Bacharach, Bamberger & Conley, 1991; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Aminah Ahmad, 1996a, 1996b; Noraini Mohd Noor, 2001). Role conflict may also lead to various psychological problems (Greenglass, 1985; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992).

Social support, on the other hand, has been found to have positive effects on those suffering from stress. Support from the husband, family members, friends and the employer could in some ways, relieve the strain of work-family conflict. Various sources of social support, both at home and at the office, help in reducing stress and conflict.

Some research findings indicated that employed mothers were perceived to be less family-oriented and less dedicated to their families than non-employed mothers.⁵ According to Noraini: "...they (employed mothers) are likely to feel guilty if these home-related responsibilities are not attended to properly."⁶

Role strain occurs when people perceive a difficulty in fulfilling their role obligations (Johnson & Johnson, 1977). Role strain for employed women consists of conflict between a job and family responsibilities.

The dual demands from work and family may lead to stress. Role strain may cause fatigue, emotional depletion and guilt. Conflict between work and family have been found to be correlated with the following: increased health risks, poorer performance in parenting role, decreased productivity, tardiness, absenteeism, turnover, low morale, reduced job and life satisfaction and burnout.⁷

The underlying assumption is: the more roles women hold, the more likely they will experience role overload (more demands than they can handle) and role conflict (role demands in one domain affecting the functioning in another domain).⁸ The quality of women's work life is strongly linked to the quality of their marital and parent-child relationships.⁹

Work and family are interrelated spheres in a person's life. This research is about work-family conflict and social support among women academicians. In order to get a clearer picture, a case study was conducted on married women academicians at the Program for Diploma Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

1.3 Importance of Study

In general, one unique characteristic of the academic life is the flexibility of schedules and the potential for integrating work and family life. This academic culture in which a clear boundary (between work, leisure and family) is lacking, is also the major challenge for many academicians. Often, work may impinge on the family life of women academicians.

¹ The area of research on role conflict and social support in Malaysia is relatively recent and is confined to specific studies on particular segments. Previous research on work-family conflict or role conflict in Malaysia, have focused on regular office employees (such as, factory workers and clerical employees) and women researchers. There is a dearth of information on role conflict among women academicians in Malaysia.¹⁰

Information regarding the extent of support received from the various sources at the workplace would indicate the nature of the relationship between bosses or supervisors

and the staff, namely women academicians. This research will be able to provide an insight into the level of role conflict that women academicians experienced. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the local literature on role conflict among women academicians in public universities.

The impact arising from the changes in the demographic composition and the feminization of the teaching staff in public universities may not have received serious attention. Women academicians in universities have been entrusted the responsibility of providing education and training as well as nurturing the younger generation to be able to take on the challenges of the job market. It will definitely be beneficial to understand their problems and try to provide amicable solutions to these problems, so that they will be motivated to perform their best.

The findings of this research may help raise the awareness of those involved in the management of higher learning institutions regarding work-related problems faced by women academicians. This report hopes to highlight the problems experienced by the female teaching staff and the implications of role conflict on women academicians, in particular and the university, in general.

The government has embarked on serious efforts aimed at increasing women's participation in the labor force. Human resource policies and practices may require a detailed re-examination, as some tended to be lacking in gender-sensitivity. This research

might also be useful to policy-makers, particularly those from the Women and Family Development Ministry, National Unity and Social Development Ministry, Human Resources Ministry and Education Ministry. It is imperative that women's views be considered when formulating policies, as these policies may directly or indirectly affect women.

Furthermore, if corrective steps are not taken, the current policies and practices may effectively negate the efforts made by the government thus far, to encourage women's participation in the economy.

Finally, this research might be of social interest to the public, who view lecturing in universities as a profession that is of high social status. They might be interested to learn more about this issue if they were directly affected, that is, if they were enrolled in a public university or if they had children in institutions of higher learning.

1.4 Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- (a) To examine existing studies on work-family conflict and the sources of social support;

- (b) To analyze the trend with regard to the participation of women in the labor force and the challenges faced by women, particularly women academicians;
- (c) To examine the level of role conflict experienced by married women academicians, the sources of social support received as well as the relationship between work-family conflict and social support; and
- (d) To make recommendations and suggest steps that might help reduce role conflict among women academicians.

1.5 Scope And Limitations

This research traces the development of women's participation in the labor force and highlights some of the major challenges that women, particularly women academicians in public universities, have faced and are facing in their endeavor to attain financial security. The research also examined the perceptions with regard to women's roles and responsibilities, childcare, the inhibiting factors that prevent women academicians from securing top management positions in universities as well as the dilemma of balancing a range of competing demands resulting from the multiple roles that women academicians assume.

A study of the trends and developments taking place in tertiary education was made. These developments might positively be seen as being the stimuli for a paradigm shift, leading to the adoption of various innovations among academicians. On the contrary, these developments might also be a cause for concern and anxiety to quite a number of women academicians.

Finally, this research examined a case study on a group of married women academicians, teaching the Diploma courses at the various departments of the Program for Diploma Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Incidentally, all the married women academicians were Malays (See Appendix 1: Organization Profile). The areas that were investigated were the level of role conflict among these married women academicians, the extent of social support received by them from work and non-work sources as well as the relationship between the level of role conflict and the extent of social support received.

Due to time and financial constraints, the researcher faced several limitations. The first limitation was that there is a dearth of information regarding the challenges or problems encountered by women academicians in the country.¹¹ However, some assumptions could be made and deduced from various newspaper articles and reports relating to the future directions, developments and trends of tertiary education in Malaysia.

Second, was the lack of a systematically organized compilation of official statistics on the number of women academic staff in the various universities and the positions they held in the Ministry of Education's publications. Furthermore, the compiled statistics on the number of academic staff in Malaysian universities did not have the updated figures for all the years and there was no categorization according to gender. In addition, the available statistics from the Educational Statistics of Malaysia, published by the Education Ministry in 1990 and 1995 did not include any classification or figures on academic staff in universities according to management positions. The Labor Market Reports from the Ministry of Human Resources provided the total figures for the different sectors but did not categorize them according to gender or specific occupations. On the other hand, the Economic Report 1999/2000 gave a summary of the rate of labor force participation from 1995 to 1999 according to gender.

Statistics pertaining to the number of women academic staff in universities and the positions they hold can be obtained from the different universities. The major problem of getting such information from the various universities is bureaucratic red tape, which is a time-consuming process. It would have implications on the time used for the analysis.

Third, the timing of the research coincided with the end of the university's academic session. Lecturers were very busy preparing question papers, grading students' assignments, tests and quizzes as well as giving extra classes or make-up tests. As such,

a small number of lecturers were unable to return the survey questionnaires within the stipulated time.

Fourth, the focus of this research is very specific. Future research may want to examine the relationships between the different variables (supervisors' support, organizational support, personality of academicians and role of spouse) and role conflict among women academicians. It would also be useful to understand the perceptions of women academicians with regard to "supportive / non-supportive work environments." In addition, direct questions regarding spouse would have provided additional information on their role in providing support.

Fifth, the use of questionnaire survey was intended to provide an exploratory look at the experiences of women academicians. It has its disadvantages. Follow-up interviews, particularly in qualitative research, would allow for probing, clarification, as well as, reviewing findings with respondents. However, this is time-consuming.

Finally, the study was limited to women academicians who taught students at the diploma level. Due to the nature of the program, teaching workload, large class size and students' background,¹² a large number of the women academicians had very limited time to conduct research and publish. Most, focused on teaching. The situation may quite different in other universities, where women academicians are able to teach, conduct research and publish. However, the findings of this research might to some extent, be

reflective of the problems encountered by married women academicians in other public universities.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study uses data and information from both primary and secondary sources.

A. Secondary Data: Collection

Data for this research were gathered from various secondary sources. These include books, journals, magazines, newspapers, conference and seminar papers, reports, as well as, other published sources from government departments and agencies, ministries and individual researchers. For the purpose of conducting literature review, books, academic research and journals were used.

¹ Trend data for labor force participation and employment were obtained from the national population census reports and annual reports of the Ministry of Human Resources, Ministry of Education and the government five-year plans. Trends and future directions in tertiary education in Malaysia are taken from the analysis of reports and articles from newspapers, journals, magazines and papers presented at seminars and conferences. From these sources too, the problems encountered by women academicians are identified.

B. Primary Data: Collection

I. Questionnaire

A set of questionnaire, in which respondents were asked to complete was distributed to selected respondents. The questionnaire (as in Appendix 2) was put into respondents' respective pigeon-holes. Each respondent was given about one and a half weeks to respond. For their convenience, completed questionnaires were to be returned directly to an administrative staff at the main office.

(a) Sample of Study

The sampling frame consisted of 100 married, women academics teaching at Program for Diploma Studies. However, the sample was reduced to 85 because 15 lecturers were on leave (maternity/sabbatical/study/ Hajj). Sample respondents comprised tutors, lecturers and associate professors from diverse academic backgrounds. Their teaching experience ranged from one to more than fifteen years. Of the 85 questionnaires distributed, 59 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 69.42%.

(b) Instrumentation

The survey instrument consists of three parts: Section A pertains to degree of role conflict experienced by respondents, Section B measures the social support received from various sources, and Section C focuses on demographic data.

The instrument used to measure work-family conflict intensity was developed by Pleck et al. (1980:29-32).¹³ The scale used comprises eight items, developed based on

the three most prevalent aspects of work-family conflict. These were: (i) excessive work time, (ii) schedule conflicts, and (iii) fatigue or irritability. A five-point rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was adopted.

Perceptions of support from supervisor, colleagues, husband, as well as, friends and relatives were measured using the items developed by Caplan et al. (1975).¹⁴ It consists of 4 items that measured all the four sources of support. The sub-scales were selected because they directly assessed the respondent's perception of the level of social support received. Using a five-point Likert scale of response options, respondents were asked to state the extent of support from each source.

Section C contains five items aimed at collecting various demographic data of the married women academicians. They include age, income, highest academic achievement, number of children and childcare arrangement.

II. Interview And Personal Communication

Several women academicians from different fields were interviewed to get a much clearer picture regarding women and work, and the problems or challenges that women faced in the context of balancing their career and family. Discussions (face-to face or via e-mail) with these women academicians provided various insights and perspectives with regard to the challenges encountered by women academicians.

A. Secondary Data: Analysis

Data derived from the five-year plans, national population census reports and annual reports of various agencies provide the evidence for the increase in female participation in the labor force in different sectors, including universities. Information derived from the various sources was also used to examine the trends and challenges faced by women in the labor force in general, and women academicians, in particular.

B. Primary Data: Analysis

The primary data were collected, coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences PC Version (SPSS 9.0). Frequencies, mean, and percentages were used in the analysis. Correlation analysis was used to examine work-family conflict and social support.

1.7 Chapter Outline

This report comprises five chapters. Chapter One contains the introduction to the research subject and methodology. It includes the introduction to the subject studied, research statement, importance of study, objectives of the research, scope and limitations, methodology pertaining to data collection and analysis, as well as, a chapter outline.

Chapter Two provides an explanation of the terms: role conflict, work-family conflict and social support. The focus of this chapter is the review of relevant theoretical literature pertaining to work-family conflict experienced by women. In addition, the

terms 'role strain,' 'role overload' and 'role conflict' are differentiated. Sources of social support, which can help women reduce the conflict intensity that arise out of the competing and incompatible demands of work and family domains are also explained.

Chapter Three begins with the discussion of Malaysian women's participation in the labor force. This is followed by a brief examination of the developments in tertiary education, while giving due emphasis to the trends and challenges pertaining to women academicians. Included in this chapter are, the perceptions regarding women's roles and responsibilities, problems relating to childcare, an examination of the factors that prevent women academicians from securing senior-level management positions in universities as well as the dilemma of balancing the competing demands of career and personal life.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of work-family conflict and social support among married women academicians of Program for Diploma Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. It begins with the description of the profile of the respondents. This is followed by the analysis of the data gathered on the level of role conflict and discussion of the support received from work and non-work sources. Sources from the work place include supervisors and colleagues, while the non-work sources are friends or relatives and spouse. Analysis is also done to see the relationships between income and childcare arrangement, age and role conflict intensity as well as childcare arrangement and role conflict.

Chapter Five is the last chapter of this report. The first section presents the conclusions of the research conducted and wraps the discussion of role conflict, work-family conflict and social support among married women academicians. Recommendations, which have been included in the second section of this chapter, are aimed at reducing role conflict faced by working women, particularly women academicians in universities.

ENDNOTES

¹ The number of single-parent households is on the increase. In 2001, there were about 630,000 single mothers who had to bring up their children single-handedly.

² The 1984 Malaysian Population and Family Survey estimated that 7 out of 10 families are of the nuclear type as mentioned by Tey Nai Peng (1993: 251- 255).

³ Hewlett, Sylvia Ann (2000).

⁴ Taken from Malaysia (1995a).

⁵ Etaugh, C. & Study, G.G. (1989: 59-70) and Etaugh, C. & Nekolny, K. (1990: 273-280).

⁶ Noraini Mohd. Noor (2001: 69-101).

⁷ Frone, M.R., Russell, M. and Cooper, M.L. (1992: 65-78).

⁸ Coser, L. (1974) and Goode, W.J. (1960: 483-496).

⁹ Noraini Mohd. Noor (2001: 74).

¹⁰ Women academicians were included in two studies conducted by Noraini Mohd Noor (1999a: 28-39 and 1999b).

¹¹ For further discussion on this, see Roziah Omar and Azizah Hamzah (eds.) (2003). This book is a 'must-read' for those who are interested to know about the various issues and challenges confronting Malaysian women.

¹² UTM encourages the use of English in the teaching of most its courses. However, the English proficiency level of most of the diploma students is between basic and pre-intermediate. To increase students' understanding of the subject, some lecturers have resorted to teaching in both Malay and English. This sometimes leads to lecturers having to teach extra hours in order to complete the syllabus.

¹³ Pleck, J.H., Staines, G.L. & Lang, L. (1980: 29-32).

¹⁴ Greenglass et al. (1989) had also used the scale developed by Caplan et al.