CHAPTER 4

4

ANALYSIS ON ROLE CONFLICT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG WOMEN ACADEMICIANS

4.1 Introduction

A case study was conducted on married women academicians at the Program for Diploma Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur in order to examine the level of work-family conflict experienced and social support received by them. This chapter presents and discusses the findings under the following main headings: **Profile of Respondents, Role Conflict** and **Social Support Received.**

The first part of this chapter discusses the profile of respondents in general. Data regarding respondents' ages, number of children, income per month, education and care of the children are presented. Relationships between respondents' ages and number of children as well as, income and childcare arrangements are examined.

Subsequently, the second part of this chapter continues with the discussion of the level of role conflict experienced by women academicians. Finally, the third part of this chapter presents the discussion of social support received by women academicians from work and non-work sources

TABLE 4.1
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO AGE, EDUCATION, CHILDREN, INCOME AND CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENT

AGE	NO.	%	CUMULATIVE PERCENT	MEAN
Below 30 years	11	18.6	18.6	
31 - 40 years	28	47.5	66.1	
41 - 50 years	16	27.1	93.2	
51 and above	4	6.8	100.0	
Total	59			35.67
EDUCATION				
Ph.D.	4	6.8	6.8	
Masters	41	69.5	76.3	
First degree	14	23.7	100.0	
Total	59			
CHILDREN				
None	4	6.8	6.8	
1 – 2	22	37.3	44.1	
3 – 4	19	32.2	76.3	
5 and more	14	23.7	100.0	
Total	59			2.89
INCOME				
RM 1,000 - RM 2,000	5	8.5	8.5	
RM 2001 - RM 3,000	14	23.7	32.2	
RM 3,001 - RM 4,000	15	25.4	57.6	
Above RM 4,000	25	42.4	100.0	
Total	59			RM 3,517.19
CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENT				
Self-managed (on his/her own)	8	14.5	14.5	
Domestic helper	25	45.5	60.0	
Childcare center	9	16.4	76.4	
Baby sitter/neighbor	8	14.5	90.9	
Relatives	5	9.1	100.0	
Total	55			

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire

4.2 Profile of Respondents

A. Age, Education, Children, Income and Childcare Arrangement

Table 4.1 presents the data on age, education, children, income and childcare arrangements of women academicians. Less than 20% of women academicians were below the age of 30. Almost half were in the 31 to 40 years age group, while 27% of women academicians were in the 41 to 50 years age group. There were only 6.8% women academicians in the 51 and above age group. It can be seen that almost 75% of the women academicians were between 31 to 50 years of age. The mean age of the respondents was 35.67.

With regards to education, almost 79% of the women academicians had a master's degree, 23.7% had a doctoral degree and 6.8% had a bachelor's degree.

From the total of 59 respondents, 4 or 6.8% had no children. 37.3% had between 1 to 2 children, while 32.2% had 3 to 4 children. A total of 23.7% or almost one quarter of women academicians had 5 or more than 5 children. The mean number of children was 2.89.

Almost 43% of women academicians earned more than RM 4,000 per month while a quarter earned between RM 3,001 to RM 4,000 per month. 23.7% of women academicians received monthly incomes between RM 2,001 to RM 3,000 and only 8.5%

received incomes between RM 1,000 to RM 2,000 per month. The mean monthly income was RM 3,578.60.

From Table 4.1, domestic help was the most preferred choice among the alternative childcare arrangements. Almost 45% of these women academicians had domestic helpers to take care of their children at home. More than 16% reported that their children managed on their own. Approximately 15% of women academicians with children sent their children to childcare centers. Similarly, about 15% of the women obtained the help of relatives to take care of their children. Slightly more than 10% of women academicians sent their children to a babysitter or a neighbor.

B. Relationship Between Women Academicians' Age And Number of Children

From Table 4.2, it can be seen that most of the women academicians below 30 years of age had at least 1 child. Approximately half of the women academicians in the age group of 31 to 40 and about 83% of women in the age group 41 to 50 had at least three children. The above trends seem to coincide with women's productive age and Malay fertility rates. It is also a reflection of the tendency among young women to postpone marriage in pursuit of economic independence and career development - thus delaying child-bearing.[1]

TABLE 4.2
DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIANS WITH CHILDREN BY AGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Age Cohort	No. of Children		
	1-2	3-4	5/>
Below 30	8	1	-
31-40	10	10	7
41-50	3	4	10
Above 50	1	1	-
Total	22	16	17
%	40	29	31

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire

C. Relationship Between Income And Childcare Arrangement

Table 4.3 indicates that almost half of those who earned more than RM 4,000.00 per month and almost 60% of those who earned RM 3,000.00 per month, employed domestic helpers or maids to look after their children.[2] 14% of women academicians (income range: RM 1,000 to more than RM 4,000) sent their children to childcare centers.[3]

TABLE 4.3
DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIANS WITH CHILDREN BY CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENT AND MONTHLY INCOME

	Income				
Childcare Arrangement	RM 1000 - 2000	RM 2001 - 3000	RM 3001 - 4000	Above RM 4000	Total
Self-managed	-	-	2	7	9
Domestic helper	-	4	8	12	24
Childcare center	2	2	2	2	8
Babysitter/ neighbor	1	3	1	1	6
Relatives	-	4	1	3	8
Total	3	13	14	25	55

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire

Table 4.3 shows that only about 11% of the women academicians sent their children to a babysitter or neighbor. 50% of women academicians in this category earned between RM 2,001 to RM 3,000. It may be cheaper than sending the children to a childcare center.[4]

Almost 15% of women academicians had relatives to care for their children. Half of the women academicians in this category earned between RM 2,001 to RM 3,000 per month. With the decline in the number of extended families, getting the help of relatives to take care of working women's children has become increasingly more difficult. For example, in the past, a grandmother who was still able, might volunteer to take care of her grandchildren.[5]

Almost 17% of women academicians reported that their children were left to manage on their own. As the children grow older, some parents believe that their children are able to manage independently on their own at home. Older siblings may be required to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. In addition, upper primary school children may also be reluctant to stay at a babysitter's or neighbor's home. They would feel more comfortable in the confines of their own homes.[6]

4.3 Work-Family Conflict

As mentioned by Coser (1974), both the family institution and occupations are greedy institutions that place high demands on an individual's time, energy, loyalty and commitment. Teaching, as reported by women academicians (in Table 4.4), is an exhausting career. Besides doing their work in the office, during regular office hours, women academicians may continue to do their office work at home, and this may prevent them from spending their free time with their families. At the end of the tiring day, women academicians who are without helpers or maids (i.e. more than 50%), return home to take on yet another set of challenging tasks and responsibilities - as a wife, mother, cook, cleaner and nanny.[7]

Table 4.4 presents women academicians' responses regarding items measuring work-family conflict and their means, ranking and standard deviations. "Work–family conflict" is used to denote "work interference with family." The mean of work-family conflict is 2.81. This indicates that women academicians experience a moderate level of work-family conflict intensity.

From Table 4.4, the results indicate that most women academicians were highly committed to their profession and they were spending much of their time doing work-related tasks at home. Thus, some women academicians became irritable at home. Studies by Greenhaus et al. (1989) and Higgins, Duxbury & Irving (1994) indicated that the higher the level of involvement in either work or family roles, the greater is the possibility for an individual to experience conflict.

TABLE 4.4
WOMEN ACADEMICIANS' RESPONSES REGARDING WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, MEANS, RANKING & STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ITEMS MEASURING WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD	Ranking
After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do.	4	14	5	29	7			
	6.8 %	**23.7%**	**8.5%**	**49.2%**	**11.9%**	**3.36**	**1.17**	**1**
My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with my family.	4	28	4	18	5			
	6.8%	**47.5%**	**6.8%**	**30.5%**	**8.5%**	**2.86**	**1.18**	**2**
Because my work is demanding, at times I am irritable at home.	4	24	11	18	2			
	6.8%	**40.7%**	**18.6%**	**30.5%**	**3.4%**	**2.83**	**1.05**	**3**
On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away time for my family interests.	4	25	10	18	2			
	6.8%	**42.4%**	**16.9%**	**30.5%**	**3.4%**	**2.81**	**1.06**	**4**
The demands of my job make it difficult to be relaxed all the time at home.	7	24	6	18	4			
	11.9%	**40.7%**	**10.2%**	**30.5%**	**6.8%**	**2.80**	**1.20**	**5**
My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work while I am home.	5	27	6	19	2			
	8.5%	**45.8%**	**10.2%**	**32.2%**	**3.4%**	**2.76**	**1.10**	**6**
My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I'd like to be.	4	33	6	12	4			
	6.8	**55.9**	**10.2**	**20.3**	**6.8**	**2.66**	**1.09**	**7**
My work schedule often conflicts with my family life.	10	33	2	11	3			
	16.9	**55.9**	**3.4**	**18.6**	**5.1**	**2.39**	**1.13**	**8**

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire N=59

In general, as can be seen in Table 4.4, it can be suggested that some women academicians devote a lot of their time and energy on work assignments and they seem to be less able to handle the demands of the other roles. Studies by Ganster and Fusilier (1989) and Karasek and Theorell (1990) indicated that autonomy is a job characteristic that is important to an individual's psychological well-being. Although there exist flexibility and job autonomy, women academicians might still feel irritable because they are physically drained and mentally exhausted at the end of the day. Furthermore, a study conducted on university professors by Tronvig (1987) revealed that the levels of role conflict experienced by these professors were related to their personal and academic backgrounds. Tronvig highlighted that age, rank, tenure, years of experience and years of service to be negatively correlated with role conflict.[8]

In two studies conducted by Aminah Ahmad (1999a, 2002) it was found that the means for work-family conflict for married female factory operators was and married female clerical bank employees were 2.8 and 2.38, respectively.[9] This again suggests that comparatively, the mean work-family conflict for women academicians (2.81) is slightly higher than that experienced by women in the stated occupational groups. It can be suggested that regardless of the types occupations or positions assumed by women in any organization, working mothers do experience work-family conflict, as a consequence of occupying both work and family roles. [10]

Unsurprisingly, "*After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do*" was the most highly endorsed item (mean=3.36). Both factory operators and bank employees also ranked this item as number one. As mentioned by Duxbury and Higgins (1991), many women accepted that their primary role was that of being a mother (a traditional role expectation held by them). According to Gutek, Searle & Klepa (1991), women were more likely to accept that family responsibilities were theirs and thus they would view housework as less of an imposition. [11]

As shown in Table 4.4, 11.9% of women academicians strongly agreed with the statement, "*After work, I come home too tired to do some of the things I'd like to do*" and 49.2% agreed with the statement. 23.7% disagreed with the statement, 6.8% strongly disagreed while 8.5% were unsure. Teaching causes mental and physical fatigue. Women academicians, who do not have much assistance with regard to the domestic and childcare chores, would probably be extremely exhausted to do many of the things they want to do or have planned to do. Age too, may be the cause of their tiredness. [12]

The second highly endorsed item was "*My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with my family*" (mean=2.86). However, this item was ranked third by both factory operators and bank employees. Women academicians do often bring unfinished 'office work' home. [13]

On closer examination of Table 4.4, it can be seen that 8.5% of women academicians strongly agreed with the statement "*My work takes up time that I'd like to spend with my family,*" while 30.5% agreed with the statement. However, a total of 54.3% felt that their work did not take up time that they would like to spend with their family, while 47.5% disagreed with the statement. 6.8% strongly disagreed and 6.8% were unsure. This may indicate the flexibility of the teaching profession as well as probably good time management by some of these women academicians.

The item that was ranked third by women academicians was "*Because my work is demanding, at times I am irritable at home*" (mean=2.83). This item was ranked fourth by the female bank clerks and fifth by the factory operators in the studies conducted by Aminah Ahmad (1999a, 2002). Studies conducted by Pleck and Rustad (1980) and Frankenhaeuser et al. (1990) found that working women with children have a greater total workload in comparison to men and they have half an hour less sleep per night. Cleary and Mechanic (1983) found that having children at home increased the distress of employed mothers.[14] Thus, the unique features of the teaching profession, domestic chores, "fulfilling" the demands of the children and the lack of sleep might probably cause women academicians to become irritable at home.

In the case of these women academicians, they are experiencing a negative spillover. The demands of the job may cause them to feel tense, exhausted and worried. Consequently, this emotional tension leads to women academicians being uptight, irritable and even explosive at home. Sometimes, when they are not able to control these feelings, women academicians might easily lose their temper for the slightest mistakes made by their children.

From Table 4.4, it can be seen that 47.5% of women academicians disagreed with the statement "*Because my work is demanding, at times I am irritable at home.*" 40.7% disagreed with this statement and 6.8% strongly disagreed. However, 30.5% agreed with this statement, while 3.4% strongly agreed with this statement. The percentage of those who were unsure was comparatively high, that is 18%. Balancing marriage, motherhood and a full-time career is a daily struggle for women academicians. Some women academicians might experience role strain – conflict between work and family responsibilities and this might cause them to be irritable.

"*On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away time for my family interests*" took the fourth place (mean=2.8). Some women academicians are involved in the teaching of off-campus courses and outstation assignments (for example, the supervision of students undergoing industrial training and inspection/quality visits of UTM franchise centers). Lecturers also do attend seminars and courses regularly. Often,

their families have to be left behind. Female clerks ranked this item sixth and factory operators, seventh.

A closer examination of Table 4.4 indicates that about half of the women academicians disagreed with the following statement: "*On the job I have so much work to do that it takes away time for my family interests.*" 6.8% strongly disagreed and 42.4% disagreed. 30.5% agreed with the statement while 3.4% strongly agreed. 16.9% were unsure. Because of the flexibility of teaching in universities, most women academicians would try to adjust their work around the family. But, sometimes that may not be possible. With the help of computers, much work (e.g. preparation of examination questions, lecture notes, computation of marks) can be done at home.

The item that was placed fifth by women academicians was "*The demands of my job make it difficult to be relaxed all the time at home*" (mean=2.81). The findings of this study suggest that because of the demands of work, some women academicians were quite stressed out even when they were with their families. This may be true particularly in the case of women academicians who do not have hired help or those whose family members are too young to help or uncooperative to assist them with the household chores.[15] This item was ranked sixth by female bank clerks and eighth by factory operators.

From Table 4.4, 52.6% disagreed with the statement "*The demands of my job make it difficult to be relaxed all the time at home.*" 11.9% strongly disagreed and 40.7% disagreed. 30.5% agreed with this statement, while 6.8% strongly agreed. 10.2% were unsure. More than half of these women academicians were able to feel relaxed at home. Some of the contributing factors might be the presence of supportive, considerate and cooperative family members, good time management as well as personality types.

The item that was ranked sixth by women academicians was "*My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work while I am home*" (mean=2.76). More than a third of women academicians, who often did work-related tasks at home, reported that their family disliked it. Research by Frone, Russell & Cooper (1992) found that work was more likely to interfere with family life than family life interfering with work.

From Table 4.4, 54.2% disagreed with the statement "*My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work while I am home*" (8.5% strongly disagreed and 45.8% disagreed). 32.2% agreed with the statement, while 3.4% strongly agreed. 10.2% were unsure. With proper time management, careful planning and supportive family members to assist women academicians with the household chores, women academicians would be able to have much more time to indulge in family activities. Some women academicians do bring home 'office work' because they may have deadlines to meet. Moreover, they would feel guilty if they spent too much time at the office.

"My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I'd like to be" was ranked seventh by women academicians (mean=2.66). This may suggest that some women academicians might feel a sense of guilt for not spending 'enough' time with their families or for not giving as much attention to their families as they would really like to when they were at home.

From Table 4.4, 62.7% disagreed with the statement *"My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I'd like to be."* 6.8% strongly disagreed and 55.9% disagreed. 20.3% agreed with the statement, while 6.8% strongly agreed. 10.2% were unsure. More than 60% of the women academicians believed that teaching in the university did not prevent them from being the 'ideal' spouse or parent. Only about 27% thought the job prevented them from being the 'ideal' spouse or parent. This might be because they were not spending enough 'quality' time with their family or because of their high expectations (i.e. perceptions regarding the 'ideal' spouse or parent).

The item that was the least endorsed by women academicians was *"My work schedule often conflicts with my family life"* (mean=2.39). Almost three quarter of women academicians believed that lecturing did not conflict with family life. University lecturers do have some extent of job autonomy. Women academicians felt that their work schedule was quite flexible, allowing them to manage their time accordingly. Moreover, because of the existence of some flexibility in the lecturing profession, it would appear that many women academicians were able to balance career and family life.

It can be seen from Table 4.4 that 72.8% disagreed with the statement " *My work schedule often conflicts with my family life.*" 16.9% of women academicians strongly disagreed, while 55.9% disagreed. 18.6% agreed with the statement and 5.1% strongly agreed. Only 3.4% were unsure. Teaching in a university probably conjures up a picture of a career that is quite flexible and quite autonomous. It can be suggested that most of the women academicians were able to combine work and family satisfactorily because their work schedules were not too rigid.

Finally, Table 4.4 also depicts the existence of two distinct groups of women academicians and the differences in the degree of role conflict experienced by them. The preceding discussion has highlighted several relevant research findings, which could explain and support the findings of this study.

4.3.1 Work-Family Conflict Intensity

Women experienced different levels of role conflict intensity as a result of the dual responsibility of home and career. In a study done by Scarr, Phillips and McCartney (1989), it was found that irrespective of the social class of dual-career families, wives performed a greater part of childcare and household tasks. The high expectations of some husbands with regard to their wives' 'quality' of housekeeping and general management (including caring, disciplining and children's studies) may exacerbate the intensity of role conflict experienced by women academicians.

TABLE 4.5
DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIANS BY WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT INTENSITY

Conflict intensity		Frequency	%
High	(>3)	17	28.8
Moderate	(2.5 – 3.0)	21	35.6
Low	(<2.5)	21	35.6

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire N=59

Mean = 2.81

Table 4.5 shows the level of conflict intensity experienced by women academicians. Women academicians who reported low conflict intensity accounted for 35.6%. 71% of women academicians reported moderate to low intensity of work-family conflict, while almost 65% of the women reported moderate to high intensity of work-family conflict. The mean of work-family conflict was 2.81, indicating that on the average women academicians experienced moderate level of work-family conflict.

A. Relationship Between Age and Work–Family Conflict

TABLE 4.6
DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIANS BY AGE AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT INTENSITY

Age	Work-Family Conflict Intensity			Total
	High (> 3.0)	Medium (2.5-3.0)	Low (< 2.5)	
Below 30-40	12 (20.3%)	14 (23.7%)	13 (22.0%)	39 (66.1%)
41-50	5 (8.5%)	5 (8.5%)	6 (10.2%)	16 (27.1%)
51 and above	0 (0%)	2 (3.4%)	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.8%)
Total	17 (28.8%)	21 (35.5%)	21 (35.5%)	59 (100%)

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire N=59

Table 4.6 indicates that women academicians in the age group 40 and below tended to experience a greater level of conflict as compared to women academicians in the other age groups. Approximately 70% of the total number of women academicians who experienced high intensity of work-family conflict were in the age group 40 and below. Only 9% of women academicians between 41 and 50 years of age experienced high conflict intensity. None of the women academicians in the 51 and above age cohort experienced high level of role conflict. [16]

The majority of women academicians who experienced medium conflict intensity were also those in the age group 40 and below. Women academicians between 41 and 50 years of age who experienced medium conflict intensity made up only 9% of the total, while those in the age group of 51 and above accounted for almost 4%.

The data in Table 4.6 indicate that women academicians in the age group 40 and below and those between 41 and 50 years of age experienced varying degrees of work-family conflict. In general, women academicians in the age group 40 and below tended to experience medium conflict intensity than the other two levels of conflict intensity, while those in the 41 to 50 age group tended to experience low levels of conflict intensity. Women academicians in the age group 51 and above do not seem to experience high levels of work-family conflict, but they do experience medium and low levels of conflict intensity.

Some of the possible reasons why women academicians in the "below 30" age group reported high level of role conflict, was probably because these women might have just started their careers. Some are adjusting to married life while others might have just begun families.[17] Consequently, making the necessary adaptations and adjustments might contribute to the greater level of work-family conflict.[18]

More than half of the total number of women academicians who experienced moderate level of conflict intensity comprised women academicians between 31 and 40 years. This may suggest that some of these women are having difficulty fulfilling their work and family obligations. In his book *Seasons of a Woman's Life*, Levinson (1996) examined women's entry into adulthood and in the "age-30 transition". He found that none of the professional women in his study was able to satisfactorily balance the demands of work, family and own well-being.[19]

From the preceding discussion, it can be suggested that as women academicians grow older, they tend to experience lesser work-family conflict. Most of these women would have reduced care-giving responsibilities towards their children. A study by Helson and Wink (1992) indicated that women experienced less turmoil in their early forties and an increase in stability by 52. The researchers found that these women had decreased negative emotions, increased decisiveness and increased comfort and stability.[20]

B. Relationship Between Childcare Arrangement and Work–Family Conflict

TABLE 4.7
DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIANS BY CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENT AND WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT INTENSITY

Childcare Arrangement	Work-Family Conflict Intensity			Total
	High (> 3.0)	Medium (2.5-3.0)	Low (< 2.5)	
Self- managed	2 (3.6%)	4 (7.2%)	2 (3.6%)	8 (14.3%)
Domestic helper	8 (14.3%)	10 (17.9%)	7 (12.5%)	25 (44.6%)
Childcare center	2 (3.6%)	2 (3.6%)	5 (8.9%)	9 (16.1%)
Babysitter/ Neighbor	3 (5.4%)	3 (5.4%)	2 (3.6%)	8 (14.3%)
Relatives	2 (3.6%)	1 (1.8%)	3 (5.4%)	6 (10.7%)
Total	17 (30.5%)	20 (35.9%)	19 (34%)	56 (100%)

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire N=56

Research by Mederer (1993), Perry-Jenkins and Folk (1994) and Noraini Mohd. Noor (1997) indicated that women who received little or no support from spouses through their attitude or through the sharing of childcare and household chores experienced great stress resulting from their multiple roles. The number of children living together in the home and their ages are important factors that could affect the level of conflict experienced by women academicians. Younger children need closer care and supervision than do older children.

Findings in Table 4.7 show that women academicians who tended to experience high levels of conflict intensity were those who had domestic helpers. These women academicians might have less household chores to do but they have assumed the role of an employer. As such, they have the added responsibility of training, supervising and monitoring their domestic helpers. [21]

Women academicians tended to experience lower levels of role conflict when the children were in capable and trusted hands (e.g. childcare centers and relatives). Sending a child to a relative used to be a more prevalent practice when extended families were common. Now, most women academicians would have to consider other alternative forms of childcare arrangements. The level of anxiety among academicians will likely reduce knowing that that these childcare centers have trained caregivers and provide quality programs.

Most women academicians, whose children were self-managed, experienced moderate levels of work-family conflict. Although these children were capable of managing on their own, their mothers probably felt anxious for their children's safety. Finally, the women academicians, whose children were cared for by babysitters or neighbors, tended to experience high to moderate levels of conflict. This level of conflict intensity is relatively higher than the level of conflict experienced by the women whose children were cared for by relatives. It might suggest that relatives are much more trusted by women academicians (to take care of their children) than are neighbors or babysitters.

4.3.2 Reasons for Moderate Work-Family Conflict Intensity

The possible reasons why these women academicians experienced moderate (not high) level of role conflict are: the flexibility of the lecturing profession, job autonomy, good time management and having mentors, friends or colleagues to share their problems with. Other probable reasons might be cultural and religious values, working environment and the effectiveness of training courses.

A. Culture and Religion

As all these female women academicians were Malays (presumably Muslims), their cultural values and religious beliefs with regard to patience, sacrifice and attainment of rewards in the Hereafter would likely affect their values, attitudes and perceptions. [22] As a result of cultural influences, these women academicians may still hold the traditional perceptions that domestic duties were a married woman's primary responsibility.[23] Their religious belief may likely increase their resilience, as well as enhance their emotional and adversity quotients. [24]

B. Working Environment

A working environment that is conducive may lead to job satisfaction and low levels of conflict. In a research conducted by Nik Nadzirah Nik Mohamed (2000) on UTM Kuala Lumpur lecturers, it was found that most of the teaching staff were satisfied with the opportunities available to further their studies, the number of subjects that they

taught, university policy and administration, availability of teaching facilities, interpersonal relationships with colleagues and quality of supervision. Women academicians in UTM Kuala Lumpur derived pleasure from teaching. The study also found that women lecturers were more satisfied with the promotion opportunities and relationship with colleagues than were their male counterparts.

C. Courses

All lecturers are given the opportunity to attend several self-development courses each year. These training courses include basic teaching skills, time management, stress management and conflict management. Some of the women academicians who had attended these courses found them to be very useful in helping them cope with the academic life. However, very few lecturers have had the opportunity to attend all these courses.

4.4 Social Support Received By Women Academicians

As social beings, the quality of a woman academician's life depends largely on her interpersonal relationships.[25] People who have strong support systems are better able to cope with the major life changes and challenges.[26] Among the advantages of receiving social support are the increased feelings of being valued and the enhancement of self-esteem. In addition, it helps women academicians define and understand their problems and find solutions. Table 4.8 presents the means, standard deviations and ranking of the four main sources of support received by women academicians.

TABLE 4.8
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND RANKING OF SOURCES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Source of Social Support	Mean	SD	Rank
Supervisor	3.46	3.5	1
Co-worker/ Colleagues	2.73	2.75	3
Husband	2.02	1.75	4
Friends or Relatives	2.85	2.51	2

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire

As can be seen from Table 4.8, women academicians received the most support from their supervisors. Friends or relatives were the next most important source of social support for women academicians, followed by colleagues or co-workers. The extent of support received by women academicians from their husbands was the least.

In contrast, a study conducted on women in industry by Aminah Ahmad (1999a) found that women in the industry received the most social support from their husbands (mean=4.3). Co-workers was ranked second (mean=2.9), friends or relatives took the third place (mean=2.8), while supervisors was ranked fourth (mean=2.2).

A. Supervisor

"Supervisors" in the case of these women academicians, refers to their respective coordinators and heads of departments. Being academicians themselves, these supervisors should be able to understand the problems relating to academic matters. However, supervisors who are equipped with the skills required of good managers,

especially people skills and situational management, would be more capable of providing the necessary social support to women academicians than those who were not.

As shown in Table 4.8, women academicians received the greatest support from their supervisors (mean=3.46). For these women academicians, their supervisors would seem to be the most logical and natural choice to seek help from when work-related problems arose. Supervisors have both power and authority; they might probably be perceived to have the capacity to understand the situation. Thus, supervisors might seem to be the most suitable or logical channel for women academicians to express their problems to because these supervisors would be able to take immediate corrective actions to rectify these work-related problems.[27]

[1] As mentioned in the research conducted by Greenberger et al. (1989) and Warren & Johnson (1995), supervisor's flexibility regarding family responsibilities did help to reduce women's strain significantly. In addition, Greenhaus et al. (1987) found a significant correlation between perceptions of a non-supportive work environment and increased level of work-family conflicts. Goff et al. (1990) found that supervisors' supportiveness regarding family-related problems of women participants was directly related to lowered role conflict.

B. Friends or Relatives

From Table 4.8, friends and relatives were the second source of social support (mean=2.85) for women academicians after supervisors. Generally, women tend to self-disclose their emotions of anxiety, depression and fear more than men.[28] They are more willing to disclose their feelings with their best friends because these are the people in whom they trust, are supportive and possess qualities that encourage disclosure.[29] In their book *Women and Friendship*, Block and Greenberg (1985) mentioned numerous case studies on the close friendships among women and the emotional support they provided. Etzion and Pines (1981) believed women chose non-work sources of support that were not available in the stressful situation because talking with others was their strategy when dealing with stress.

C. Colleagues or Co-Workers

Findings from this study (as in Table 4.8) indicate that women academicians received moderately high degree of support from co-workers or colleagues. Support from co-workers or colleagues was ranked third (mean=2.73).

Research by Hibbard and Pope (1987) suggested that support at work was an important resource for well-being and job satisfaction. Andrisani (1978) found that co-worker support was found to be more salient for women's job satisfaction than men. Receiving support from colleagues or co-workers is important because women academicians may feel less stressed when problems are shared. Colleagues or co-workers

may present different perspectives to a problem and may offer useful advice on how to deal with these problems. However, studies by Greenberger et al. (1989) and Reifman et al. (1991) found no relationship between co-worker support and role stress among women.

D. Husband

Table 4.8 shows that women academicians received the least support from husbands. Support received from husbands was ranked fourth (mean=2.02). Support can be in the form of giving emotional strength or by sharing childcare and household tasks.[30] Some husbands might also be poor listeners [31] or they might lack conversational competence.[32]

Listening is influenced by factors such as, feedback approaches and gender. In her book, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990), Deborah Tannen pointed out several differences between men and women with regard to listening. According to Tannen, women used listening for the purposes of seeking to build rapport and to establish a closer relationship, while men wanted to be given due respect. Listening is a skill, which not many husbands have mastered.[33]

Some husbands view their spouses as individuals, who are intelligent, independent and capable of meeting the challenges at their workplace.[34] The findings might suggest that some women academicians do not seem to perceive their husbands as their 'best friends' or confidantes.[35]

TABLE 4.9
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ITEMS MEASURING SOCIAL SUPPORT

Item	Supervisor/ Boss		Co-workers/ Colleagues		Husband		Friends/ Relatives	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
How much do these people go out of their way to do things to make life easier for you?	3.37	1.03	2.93	1.04	2.05	1.17	2.91	1.18
How much can each of these people be relied on when things get tough at work?	3.30	1.20	2.66	1.09	2.10	1.13	3.12	1.16
How much is each of the following people willing to listen to your personal problem?	3.58	1.04	2.68	1.06	1.98	1.23	2.68	1.11
How easy is it to talk with each of the following people?	3.58	1.21	2.64	1.07	1.92	1.15	2.66	1.17

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire

A detailed analysis of the items, which measure social support as in Table 4.9, indicates the following:

1. A significant number of women academicians seem to have considerate supervisors or bosses who *"go out of their way to do things to make life easier"* for them (mean=3.37). Co-workers or colleagues are ranked second (mean=2.93), followed by friends or relatives (mean=2.91) and husbands were ranked last (mean=2.05).

   Besides the reasons discussed in preceding paragraphs, another probable reason for husband being placed the last might be because of the traditional expectations held by some husbands regarding their wives' roles. The unequal (or the lack of) sharing of household tasks and child rearing, especially among women academicians who do not have hired help, probably tended to cause women to be rather stressed out. Thus, husbands might not be perceived by their wives as helping to make their (wives') lives much easier.

2. For the item *"people to be relied on when things get tough at work,"* women academicians ranked supervisors first (mean=3.30) and friends or relatives were the second most important source of support (mean=3.12). Co-workers or colleagues were ranked third (mean=2.66), while husbands took the fourth place (mean=2.10). Supervisors were ranked first probably because they are in positions of authority to rectify many of the work-related problems. Friends and relatives

may be confided in, especially if the problem was related to interpersonal relationships with colleagues at work.

3. The people who were most willing to listen to the personal problems of women academicians were supervisors (mean=3.58). This is an indication of a positive superior-subordinate relationship, with many of the supervisors or bosses showing concerned about their employees' problems. There exist a good rapport and trust between the supervisors and subordinates. Co-workers (or colleagues) and friends (or relatives)were jointly ranked second (mean=2.68). They probably had more time to spare than the husbands of women academicians. Husband took the last place (mean=1.98).

4. Most women academicians found it the easiest to talk with their supervisors or bosses (mean=3.58). Friends or relatives was ranked second (mean= 2.66) and co-workers or colleagues was ranked third (mean=2.64). Husbands were the least easy to talk with (mean=1.92). A further investigation would provide answers for this scenario.

TABLE 4.10
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Relationship	r	t-test	Significant
Supervisor and Work- Family Conflict	- 0.024	0.000	*
Co-workers and Work-Family Conflict	0.038	0.643	
Husband and Work-Family Conflict	0.196	0.000	*
Friends or Relatives and Work Family Conflict	0.151	0.805	

Source: Data collected from survey questionnaire * Significant at 0.05 confidence level

Table 4.10 shows the relationship between work–family conflict and social support. As indicated in Table 4.10, there are two correlations that are significant - a negative correlation between work-family conflict and supervisor support and a positive correlation between work-family conflict and husband.

As mentioned earlier, support received from supervisor tended to decrease work-family conflict experienced by women academicians. Thomas and Ganster (1995) found that supportive supervisors significantly helped to reduce work-family conflicts among employees. In their book, *Psychology and Work Today,* Schultz, D. and Schultz,. S. E. (2001) mentioned that the first-line supervisor, who may be seen as "the personification of the organization's social support network", is the most important buffer against job stress.

In addition, studies conducted by Noraini Mohd. Noor (1997), Perry-Jenkins and Folk (1994) and Mederer (1993) indicated that women who lacked or did not receive much support from their husbands (in terms of attitude towards their employment or

involvement in child-caring and household chores), were found to be stressed by their multiple roles.

4.5 Conclusion

Women academicians are faced with different sets of roles and responsibilities, one at home and another at work. Role conflict has undesirable consequences for women academicians and the university. Individuals who are exposed to conflict tend to have feelings of anxiety, frustration and stress resulting from their inability to cope with the diverse pressures (Kahn et. al, 1964; Fisher & Gitelson, 1983). The stress of juggling work and family may have serious health implications on women academicians because they have little time to rest mentally and physically.

Teaching in a university is a demanding profession that requires high mental and verbal dexterity. When women academicians take on more work-related responsibilities, they are adding on to their lives more demands in addition to the existing ones that they already have. Findings from this study show that women academicians experience different levels of role conflict. With regard to childcare, less than half of the women academicians had domestic helpers to care for their children.

This study also found that the most important source of support at the workplace was supervisors. Supervisor's support was significant to work-family conflict. An increase in support received from supervisors tends to decrease work-family conflict. In addition to supervisor support, work/life balance and family-friendly initiatives (for

example, childcare facilities) may be a long-term solution in helping to reduce work-family conflict experienced by women academicians.

Supervisors have a central role to play in helping women academicians reduce their level of work-family conflict. Colleagues, friends, relatives as well as spouse are important sources of social support for women academicians. These work and non-work sources of social support can help reduce the level of conflict that women academicians experience and help to improve their well-being. The performance of women academicians can be further enhanced if the university management responds to the realities of family life experienced by these women academicians and increases its efforts towards making the work environment more family-friendly. Reductions in work-family conflicts will consequently increase job satisfaction among women academicians leading to improved organizational performance.

Endnotes

[1] Fatimah Abdullah (2000) and Tey Nai Peng (1991).

[2] It is comparatively less expensive to hire a stay-in domestic helper to look after the children, especially in cases where there are many children. Domestic helpers usually receive a minimum wage of approximately RM350 a month for the services they render – childcare, housekeeping and preparation of meals. In addition, it is also more practical, more convenient and less of a hassle, to have a domestic helper take care of more than two children, than to send them to the child-minder's place, especially for those who have transportation problems.

[3] Sending a child to a childcare center is a costly affair. A childcare center, depending on its location and the quality of service provided, may charge a minimum fee in the range of RM200 to RM400 per child, per month in the Klang Valley. The fees charged may also vary according to a child's age. The quality of a childcare center varies.

[4] Among the factors that determine the fees charged by ababysitterare: location, age of child, number of children being sent and the number of children in her care. The minimum fee ranges from RM150.00 to RM300.00 per child, per month. However, among the Chinese community, it is not unusual to pay a babysitter double this amount.

[5] Particularly in urban areas, as more women participate in the workforce, and with the extension of the retirement age in the public sector to 56, many grandmothers will not be able to help take care of their grandchildren while their own children were at work, since they may still be employed. Moreover, some of the more modern grandparents may be involved in a combination of pursuits - social work, educational, religious or leisure activities.

[6] Information was obtained from discussions with several women academicians in UTM, Kuala Lumpur.

[7] Hochschild, Arlie (1989).

[8] Tronvig, Jill Anne (1987).

[9] Aminah Ahmad (1999a: 57 - 80; 2002: 168 - 178).

[10] In-depth coverage regarding women, work and family in Noraini Mohd Noor (2001b: 112 – 132).

[11] However, more women have come to realize that it is impossible to be 'supermums'. For further discussion on this, see *The Malay Mail*, June 13, 2002, 'Enough of being a superwoman'.

[12] In addition to the conflict that middle-aged women academicians experience, their problems are usually compounded by their own age-related circumstances (for example, lower levels of energy and the onset of serious ailments). For an in-depth discussion on this, see Brody, E.M. (1990).

[13] In general, university lecturers teach, advise students, conduct research, publish and serve on university committees. In one single day, they may assume multiple roles.

[14] Cleary, P. and Mechanic, D. (1983: 111-121).

[15] As stated earlier, about 46% of women academicians had employed helpers or maids. Thus, more than 50% of women academicians have to handle much of the responsibility for childcare and household chores.

[16] Table 4.6 includes the 4 women who did not have any children (2 below 30 years of age, 2 between 31 and 40 age cohort).

[17] Studies by Campbell et al., (1976); Doherty & Jacobson, (1982: 667-680) and Gerson et al. (1984: 434-453), indicated that young women who do not have children tended to be happier with their marriages, more satisfied with their lives, more successful in their careers and less likely to experience role conflict, in contrast to those with children. When they get married and have children, women academicians are assuming greater roles at home. With greater responsibilities come increased challenges and conflicts. For further discussion on this, see Hill (1964: 186-206).

[18] With the birth of a baby, couples tend to experience a modest decline in the overall quality and intimacy of their marital life. This decline in marital satisfaction tends to be greater for wives than for husbands. Couples who are most likely to report marital problems in early parenthood are those who held the most unrealistic expectations of parenthood. In addition, unequal sharing of household chores may lead to a wife's negative feelings toward her husband. For an in-depth discussion on this, see Belsky & Rovine (1990: 5-19).

[19] According to Levinson, they felt that they had sacrificed either family or career in the struggle to maintain both.

[20] Women in their early fifties were described by Mitchell and Helson (1990: 451-470) to be in their 'prime of life'. Furthermore, when children leave home mothers will probably learn to adjust and find new interests and activities (Grambs, 1989).

[21] While having domestic helpers might help lighten the burden of domestic work and childcare, it might also be a cause of emotional stress and anxiety among some women academicians.

[22] These are virtues of those who are considered pious in Islam. Saedah Siraj (2001) and Nik Azis Nik Pa (2002).

[23] Many books have been written on the qualities of ideal parents. Muhammad Thalib (1997).

[24] A mother holds a highly respected status in Islam. Performing the duties and responsibilities of a wife and mother are considered acts of worship (*ibadah*). For an indepth discussion on this, see Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (2001).

[25] According to Banyard and Graham-Bermann (1993), the giving and receiving of social support was usually seen as women's main strategy for coping with stress.

[26] Zanden, James W. Vander (2000:411).

[27] By virtue of their positions as heads of departments, some supervisors are well respected and their views may be highly regarded. G. Hostede (1980).

[28] Rosenfeld (1979:63-74) and Naifeh and Smith (1984).

[29] Wheeless & Grotz (1977: 250-257), Derlega et al. (1987: 172-187), Petronio & Bantz (1991: 263-269).

[30] I tend to agree with Noraini (2001: 93): "*Because the home is seen to be women's primary domain, in many families, men hardly contribute to the home (either childcare or household chores).*"

[31] Communication is a major problem for many couples. For more discussion on this, see *The Star*, 28 February, 2003, 'Couples not talking, so they're splitting'.

[32] This includes openness, empathy, positiveness, immediacy, interaction management, expressiveness and other-orientation. Devito (2003: 170-176).

[33] Effective listening involves listening emphatically, objectively, non-judgmentally, critically, actively and evaluating the literal as well as the hidden meanings. For further discussion on this, see Devito (2003: 79-94).

[34] Information was obtained from discussions with several women academicians in UTM, Kuala Lumpur. A number of husbands may hold management level positions and they may be burdened by more serious work-related problems. By trying to be understanding wives, some women academicians might choose not to discuss their own work problems with their spouses.

[35] Self-disclosure is limited when the woman feels that her partner will not be supportive or when the problem that was disclosed will be used against her. Sociologists Jeanette Lauer and Robert Lauer (1985: 22-26) asked 300 happily married couples of what makes a successful marriage. The most frequently cited reason was having a positive attitude toward one's spouse ("*My spouse is my best friend*").