

WORK-FAMILY BALANCE EXPERIENCE OF OMANI CAREER WOMEN

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مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ
 فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا
 كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him/her to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.

(Surah An-Nahl: 97)

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about work-family balance in Arab countries. The existing studies in Oman focus mainly on work-family related policies. Thus, this thesis investigates work-family interface as experienced by Omani career women, by exploring the contributing factors from internal and external environments. It investigates the support career women received from their spouses, family members and colleagues as well as challenges they experienced in juggling work and family roles. Underpinned by constructivist and interpretivist paradigms and driven by feminist ethnographic strategy, interview was the primary data collection tool. Two types of interviews were conducted: in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews with ten core participants and nineteen informal interviews with local people of Oman. The interview transcripts were analysed using Charmaz' Grounded Theory procedure. The key finding of the thesis is that family is the strongest and reliable support system to career women. Almost all conversational partners in this thesis were raised during the time when education was not favoured for girls and their parents had gone against the norm by supporting their daughters' education. Those parents continue their unconditional supports by taking part in raising their grandchildren. Spousal supports are highly valued and desired by every woman in the study. Women experience various forms of support, ranging from highly supportive to non-supportive. Women who experienced low to none spousal support rely on domestic helpers and family members. Experience in work domain also played significant role in providing a sense of balance in a woman's work-family experience. The finding also reveals that Oman lacks of the structural support for women workforce. The paid maternity leave is short and working mothers are suffering from lack of childcare facilities. This thesis concurs with the premise that work-family balance is a cultural construct. Theoretically, it contributes to a model that exhibits the all-pervading influence of culture in the work-family balance experience of Omani career women in the thesis. The model may serve as a guideline to organizations and human resource practitioners who wish to understand their workforce and optimize their performance. On top of this, should the government be committed in having women workforce at par with their men counterpart, improvement and enforcement of the work-family related policies are inevitable. Future research on work-family balance as experienced by women from various fields and industries are also imperative to formulate effective policies and engender healthier work-family experience.

ABSTRAK

Tidak banyak yang diketahui tentang keseimbangan kerja-keluarga di negara-negara Arab. Kajian-kajian sedia ada di Oman tertumpu kepada polisi-polisi kerja-keluarga. Oleh itu, tesis ini menyelidik isu kerja-keluarga sebagaimana yang dialami oleh wanita bekerjaya di Oman dengan meneroka faktor-faktor penyumbang daripada persekitaran dalaman dan luaran. Ia mengkaji sokongan yang diterima oleh wanita bekerjaya daripada suami, ahli keluarga dan rakan sekerja serta cabaran yang mereka alami dalam mengimbangi kerja dan keluarga. Berdasarkan paradigma konstruktivis dan interpretivis serta didorong oleh strategi etnografi feminis, temubual adalah alat pengumpulan data utama. Dua jenis temubual telah dijalankan: temubual bersemuka separa struktur yang mendalam dengan sepuluh peserta utama dan sembilan belas temubual tidak formal dengan penduduk tempatan Oman. Transkrip temubual dianalisis menggunakan prosedur *Charmaz Grounded Theory*. Dapatan utama tesis ini adalah keluarga merupakan satu sistem sokongan yang paling kukuh dan dipercayai wanita bekerjaya. Hampir kesemua rakan temubual dalam tesis ini telah membangkitkan ketika zaman di mana pendidikan tidak diberikan kepada anak perempuan dan ibu bapa mereka telah menentang norma tersebut dengan memberi sokongan kepada pendidikan anak-anak perempuan. Ibumama tersebut terus memberi sokongan dengan membantu membesarkan cucu-cucu mereka. Sokongan suami sangat dihargai dan diperlukan oleh setiap wanita dalam kajian ini. Wanita mengalami pelbagai bentuk sokongan, dari yang tinggi kepada yang tiada sokongan. Wanita yang mengalami sokongan yang rendah dan tiada langsung sokongan suami bergantung kepada pembantu rumah dan ahli keluarga yang lain. Pengalaman di tempat kerja juga memainkan peranan penting bagi wanita Oman dalam mencapai keseimbangan kerjaya dan keluarga. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa di Oman terdapat kekurangan sokongan struktural bagi tenaga kerja wanita. Cuti bersalin bergaji adalah pendek dan ibu-ibu yang bekerja merana kerana kurangnya kemudahan penjagaan kanak-kanak. Tesis ini berpendapat bahawa persoalan kerja-keluarga merupakan konstruk budaya. Secara teoretikal, ia menyumbang kepada satu model yang menunjukkan pengaruh budaya yang sedia ada terhadap pengalaman keseimbangan kerja-keluarga. Model ini boleh menjadi satu garis panduan kepada organisasi dan pengamal sumber manusia yang berhasrat untuk memahami tenaga kerja dan mengoptimumkan prestasi mereka. Selain itu, sekiranya kerajaan komited untuk mempunyai tenaga kerja wanita yang setaraf dengan rakan kerja lelaki mereka, penambahbaikan dan penguatkuasaan polisi-polisi berkaitan kerja-keluarga perlu dilakukan. Kajian masa depan tentang keseimbangan kerja-keluarga seperti yang dialami wanita daripada pelbagai bidang dan industri adalah juga penting bagi membentuk polisi-polisi yang efektif dan menghasilkan pengalaman kerja-keluarga yang lebih sihat.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	-	Asian Development Bank
MENA	-	Middle East and North Africa region
MOE	-	Ministry of Education
MOM	-	Ministry of Manpower
MONE	-	Ministry of National Economy
NCSI	-	National Center for Statistic Information
RO	-	Riyal Oman
RM	-	Ringgit Malaysia
UN	-	United Nations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The prime objective of this thesis is to establish an informed understanding of work-family balance experience among Omani career women. This chapter serves as the backdrop of the study. It presents the study background, statement of the problem, the study aim and objectives, the research questions, and the definitions of the main terms in the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

Work and family have always been essential domains of adult life. Both are demanding institutions, requiring incessant attention, limitless time and energy. As such they are always perceived as in conflict, rather than in concert. In regards to work and women, Kessler-Harris (1981, cited in Tan, 2008) stated,

Women have always worked – in their home and the home of others, in fields, factories, shops, stores, and offices. The kind of work done has varied for women of different classes, races, ethnic groups, and geographical locations. And the nature of women's work has changed over time with urbanization and industrialization. What remains the same is the ways in which

women have worked involve a constant tension between two areas of women's lives: the home and the marketplace. (p.10)

For most of the 20th century, work and family were considered as independent domains and have little to do with each other. This perception is due to the breadwinner-homemaker ideology that perceives men as the breadwinners working outside the home and women as the caregivers, running domestic duties inside the home (Gutek *et al.*, 1981; Lerner, 1994; ILO-UNDP, 2009). Balance is understood as each domain being taken care of by one person. This perception entails policies and practices governing employment based on the image of ideal worker as male, with his wife taking care of his domestic affairs (Bailyn *et al.*, 2001). However, when women entered labour force and their participation increases both quantitatively and qualitatively, this balance is severely disrupted.

Maternal employment had been assumed detrimental to children's well-being. Based on this assumption, abundant of studies had been carried out to study the effects of maternal employment to children and adolescences. Studies spanned across disciplines, with steady interest most notably from the fields of psychology, sociology, and economics. To generate solid conclusion many meta-analyses on such studies have been done. Stolz (1960) did a meta-analysis of 52 studies carried out from 1910's to 1950's on effects of maternal employment on a) delinquency, b) adjustment of adolescents, c) adjustment of elementary school children, d) achievement of children in school, e) development and adjustment of pre-school children, f) infant development, and g) perceptions and attitudes of children towards gender roles. I am afraid discussing the findings would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, I would like to underline Stolz's conclusion that researches on maternal employment and children upbringing had produced divergent findings (*ibid*, p.779). Maternal employment had been associated with both positive and negative outcomes: delinquency and non-delinquency, withdrawal as well as dominant behaviour, and good adjustment and poor adjustment among pre-school children and school children (*ibid*, p.772-778).

Another noteworthy meta-analysis was carried out by Goldberg *et al.* (2008) on 68 studies carried out between 1960's to 2000's. In their study, maternal employment variables were operationalized as any employment versus no employment as well as full-time compared to part-time and each compared to no employment, and their association with four achievement outcomes: a) formal tests of achievement, b) intellectual functioning, c) grades, and d) teacher ratings of cognitive competence. The meta-analysis also yielded nonsignificant difference between any variables of maternal employment and achievement outcomes. Much to solidifying Stolz's and Goldberg *et al.* studies, the most recent studies maintained that the relationship between maternal employment and children's learning growth (Youn *et al.*, 2012), infant development (Kim and Wickrama, 2013) and adolescent study habits (Ghosh, 2017) are enormously complex that no simple association can be established.

Despite this, the underlying skepticism was clear – a family whose mother works outside the home may neglect their families and women get to be successful only at the expense of their families. Working mothers were also labeled as non-ideal workers, since domestic roles were often considered as barriers to their job assignments. Employers often assume women with children unable to put extra hours or long travel time, which sometimes necessary for career advancement (Burn, 2005; Hutchings *et al.*, 2010; Napasri and Yukongdi, 2015).

Today, the negative perception on maternal employment has eroded over time. Improved access to education, greater autonomy in determining the family size and birth spacing have made women's advancement into labour market irreversible. Women's identity is no longer confined to domestic domain, and their capabilities in the workforce have long been acknowledged. Many international organizations like IBM, Google, Colgate-Palmolive and Johnson & Johnson have credited women their integral workforce (Adam, 2015; Dill, 2015). Women strategize. Some choose to focus on family first, and return later to work as children reach their school-age, while others opt not to have more than two children so they can advance in their career and attend to their family at the same time (Hakim, 2000; 2006). Whatever and however they do it, the motive is one – to achieve balance.

Achieving balance nevertheless remains a struggle. In many countries, family-friendly policies enable women to have both motherhood and career life (the Nordic and the Scandinavian in particular [see ILO-UNDP, 2009]). In Scandinavian countries, childcare facilities are highly accessible and affordable, contributing to the most developed economies with the highest percentage of working mothers (Sara, 2014). Mothers are entitled for 17-week maternity leave and fathers are entitled up to 14 weeks of paternity leave. Unfortunately, even where work-family policies are considered utopian, working mothers are not relieved from work-family stress. Parenting remains largely female responsibility and the majority of flexible parental leave still tends to be taken by the mothers. Men's involvement in childcare is highly valued in Sweden, but their time spent on other household tasks is less cherished: reflecting the persistent embedded gender norms, where women are still expected to spend more time on housework and childcare even when both of them work full-time (Kitterød and Rønsen, 2012; Evertsson, 2014). Therefore, Seierstad and Kirton (2015) finding was not a surprise. Their interviews with 46 Norwegian working women highlighted that the participants emphasized equality and support from their spouses at home as essential for combining a high commitment career and a family. Several women in the study emphasized the importance of consciously choosing 'the right man': someone who would support their career and who would be willing to do some of the household duties, and doing active parenting like taking a larger part of parental leave, and delivering and picking up children to/from nursery/school.

Compared to other regions in the world, workers in Asia have the longest working hours, ranging between 44 to 49 hours per week (Nurlita, 2017). This has been described not only as devotion to work, but also as adherence to traditional values where paid employment is considered a means to ensure family prosperity and financial security (Lu *et al.*, 2008; Lu *et al.*, 2010; Canlas, 2015). Asian women, therefore, are shouldering expectations to be devoted to both of their family and work roles. At work, they are expected to perform at par with their male counterpart (Canlas, 2015) and this certainly leads to conflict if there is no support either at the workplace or at home. At home, Asian women maintained as the primary executors of household work and caregiving even as they participate in the labour force. A study on South Korean working mothers found that they spend several more hours on

the weekends dealing with domestic tasks than stay-at-home mothers; catching up on the housework that piled over the week (Chung-un, 2015). Though they spend three hours less than full-time mothers on weekdays for housework, on average, they work two hours longer in terms of the length of labour both at work and home, and also have about an hour and fifty minutes less leisure time than full-time mothers. This gets aggravated with a shortage of dependable childcare facilities, not only in South Korea, but also in Japan; leading to women withdrawal from workforce due to childbirth and childcare (Wingfield-Hayes, 2013; Kim, 2015). Indeed, the turnover intention was found low where there are well-organised childcare facilities (Kim and Kim, 2013) resulting aggressive call towards establishment of childcare facilities. Spousal support was also found positively associated with South Korean and Singaporean women's retention in the workforce and work-family role satisfaction (Kim and Kim, 2013; Canlas, 2015). In Japan, where childcare facilities are severely lacking and spousal support is the lowest, women's retention was found the lowest where seventy per cent of Japanese women quit working after the birth of their first child (Wingfield-Hayes, 2013).

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The motivation for this study came about due to my own work-family struggle few years ago as I became a mother in the third year of my profession as a lecturer. While the arrival of my daughter gave me an endless joy, I found myself miserable in the desperate attempt to embrace the roles as a professional and a mother. I suddenly felt the two roles incompatible albeit the fact that I had always known that someday I would be working and having children. I did all I thought I could. Yet the feelings of not doing enough as mother and the incapability to fulfill expectations from either at home or at the workplace were exhausting. The worst was the sense of fighting a losing battle as I was feeling the failure was no one's but mine and yet I had no idea of how to correct it.

Soon before my daughter's first birthday, I decided to take unpaid leave and my husband took a job as a lecturer in Oman. The friendly ambiance in 'Ibri and the

hospitality during *qahwa* (Omani social practice where women sit together and have coffee) were exhilarating, but I was constantly being reminded of the helpless feeling I once had. The look in the faces of women I met and the tone of their voices pushed me into retrospective of the battle I lost. I sensed that they were going through what I had experienced. The empathy eventually turned into curiosity to understand how and why women experience what they experience. This study, therefore, was conducted to gain insight and inform understanding on issues and challenges surrounding work and family interface as experienced by Omani career women in the land I called home for 9 years.

This study is ethnographic for two reasons. First, it subscribes to the argument that work-family interface experience is shaped by and embedded in culture (Hofstede, 1984; Zaynab, 2005; Powell *et al.*, 2009), making the concept of 'balance' a cultural construct (Carlson *et al.*, 2009). Second, the fact that I, a Malaysian and have been in the country for almost a decade has made me a full-time participant-cum-observant researcher – an elemental tool in an ethnographic inquiry. The study participants who – borrowing from Rubin and Rubin's (2012) term – I called 'conversational partners' were 10 women from various professional backgrounds. In addition to this, as this thesis is about the experience that women live, it is therefore naturally feminist. It has been attentive to an issue (work-family balance) women face, and conscientious in its ultimate objectives to engender improvement in the experience.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

In the year 2010, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Sultan of Oman declared (NCSI, 2010, p.67):

We call upon Omani women everywhere, in the villages and the cities, in both urban and *bedu* communities, in the hills and mountains, to roll up their sleeves and contribute to the process of economic and social development....We call upon Omani women

to shoulder this vital role in the community, and are confident that they will respond to the call.

Apparently, the call has been responded positively. Data from the Ministry of National Economy revealed the steady rise of women's participation in the workforce. Times of Oman (2016) reported that the number of working Omani mothers at work has quadrupled from 8,000 in 1985 to 37,000 in 2015. Figure 1.1 depicts the rising trend of women's employment in both public and private sectors (Public Authority for Social Insurance, 2014). New social landscape emerged in the society: younger women get married at a later age than their parents, choose to have lesser number of children than their mothers' and plan for birth-spacing (Thuwayba and Tayfour, 2007; Maryam, 2015). This is revealed through the dramatic change in Oman reproductive behavior with more than five births decline per woman within a period of just two decades, after the introduction of the birth spacing program in 1994 (M Mazharul Islam, 2014). Obviously, there are deliberate strategies adopted by working mothers in order to balance their career and family. However, while the strategies work for some, they are not feasible for the other.

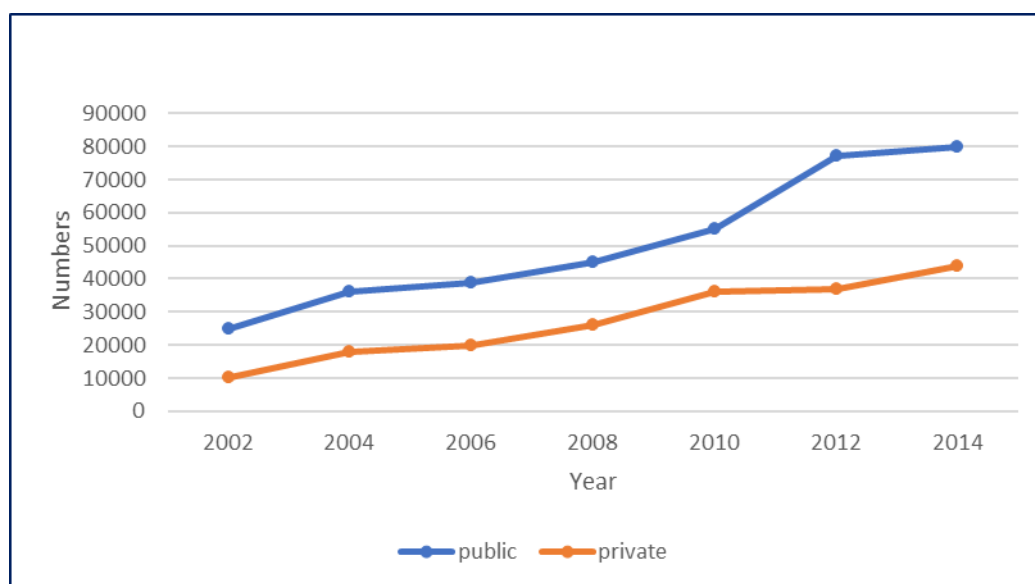


Figure 1.1: Omani women's employment in public and private sectors

A government report published in 2011 revealed a significant percentage of premature withdrawal from work among young women professionals (Ministry of National Economy, 2011). The report, entitled Omani Working Women: Realities

and Challenges presented data of the years 1993, 2003 and 2010. The data are presented in Figure 1.2.

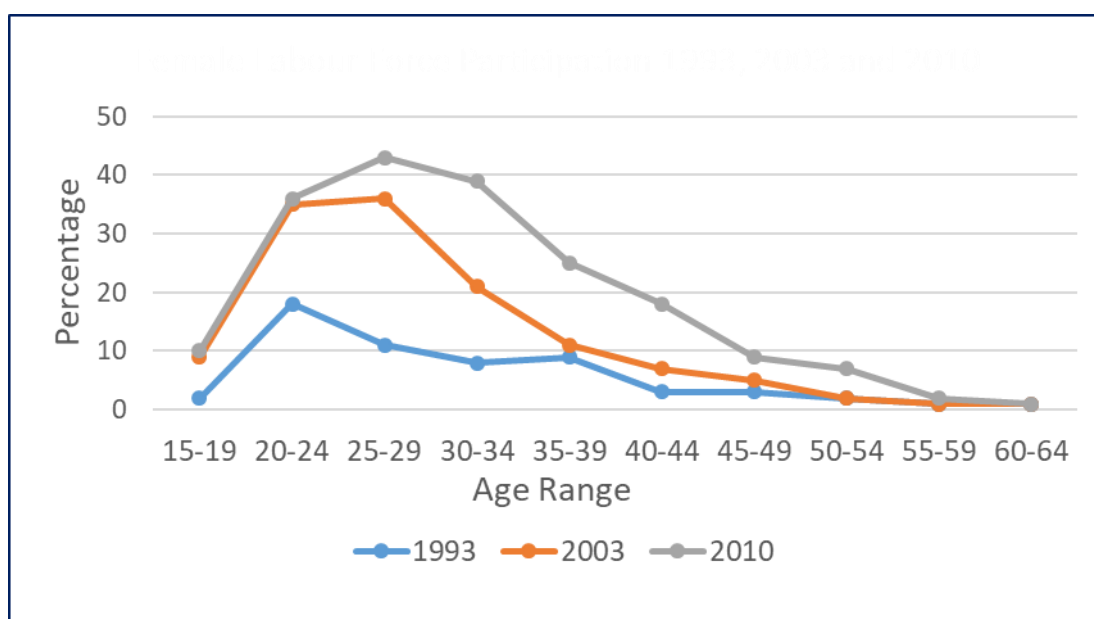


Figure 1.2: Female labour force participation for the years 1993, 2001 and 2010

There are two important points can be discerned from the report. First, there is a distinguishable trend of women withdrawing from work as they approach 30 years old. Second, data based on the three years evidently show that this trend is persisting and growing year by year. As Omani women get married at the average age of 26 (*ibid*, p.21) it explains the withdrawal, which coincides with the timing when the family is growing. The latest report published by Public Authority of Social Insurance (2014) also revealed a high percentage (73%) of women resigning from their jobs in private sector. While the report does not explain the reasons for the resignation, the percentage corresponds to the argument that longer working hours in private sector – as compared to public sector – is among the factors that make it less preferable for women (Maryam, 2015).

Indeed, work-family conflict is not a new issue in Oman. It has been mentioned a number of times in several articles written by Omani authors and non-Omani academicians residing in Oman. Salma (1999), Auhod (2004) Asya (2007) and Goveas and Aslam (2011) have explicitly named work and family issue as the factor challenging Omani women's job retention and career advancement. However,

as seen here, the articles were written about a decade ago. The issue, therefore, remains unheeded due to the dearth of succeeding research.

The dearth could be associated to several factors. First, Omani culture perceives that family-related matter is private and personal. This implies that work-family interface might be a sensitive issue to be discussed and elaborated in detail, resulting in a lack of depth in the existing studies. Second, the delicate nature of the topic also has shifted the focus more towards less sensitive aspects of the work-family interface, which are family-friendly policies (Belwal and Belwal, 2014) and work-life balance policies (Ruksana, 2015). While these studies succeeded to establish the significance of policies in affecting employees' satisfaction, another contemporaneous study (Maryam, 2015) found that when family's influence is taken into account, it proves that it overweighs the role of the policies. Her study found that women's career choice is often governed by their father's, brother's and husband's and their career paths are clearly influenced by their family (*ibid*, p.168). This highlights the dominance of family institution in collective society and Oman is certainly not an exception. However, again, Maryam's study merely unfolds the influence of the society in general (as in gender role and social expectation) without examining the support and pressure they experience at home and at the workplace. My study, therefore, was aiming to fill the huge gap by getting broader and deeper understanding of Omani career women's work-family balance experience.

1.5 Significance of the Research

The substantial dearth of study on Omani career women's work-family experience warrants the significance of this study. Based on the background of the study and the problem statement, the thesis is significant in at least three aspects:

1) Context.

Every country that has the ambition to utilize its female manpower deserves such study. For the last three decades, there has been great attention to work-family balance issue across various disciplines. A substantial body of literature

however, concentrates on certain countries and regions, mainly in Europe, America, and to a lesser extent, Asia. The dearth of research on the work-family issue in Arab countries makes the concept of work-family balance from this part of the world remains unheeded.

2) Theory.

One of the major criticisms on work-family balance literature is the tendency to universalize women's experience despite their cultural diversity (Runté, 2009). This study, therefore, adopted women-centred lens tuned into Omani culture where their roles as mother and wife mark the principle engagement and identification in this society. Having culture as a backdrop, this study was an endeavour to uncover the dynamics of the phenomenon.

3) Method of research

Women's work-family experience is dissimilar from men's (Gerson, 2004; Runté, 2009). To women, especially those in the Arab world, work-family issues are sensitive and emotion-laden topic (Asya, 2007) thus cannot be uncovered by filling in questionnaires and running statistical analysis. As such, in-depth investigation especially the arranged, loose-structured in-depth interviews justifies the adoption of feminist ethnography as the thesis approach and strategy. The ethnographic informal interview was also conducted in order to triangulate the data gathered through in-depth interviews. The combination of these techniques deemed to add a valuable adjunct to each other, and more importantly able to compensate for other's drawbacks.

1.6 Research Aim and Objectives

Based on the research problem statement this thesis aimed to explore and to comprehend work-family balance experience of career Omani women as contributed and affected by their internal and external environments. Support from husband and extended family members are considered as support from the internal environment, while supports from colleagues and superior are considered as support from external

environment. These both environments complement each other and both are equally important

Considering balance as a cultural construct (Carlson *et al.*, 2009), this study also investigated their perceptions of balance, and how they strategize to attain it. This study was hopeful that the findings would provide meaningful insights and become one of the references for human resource policy formulation in Oman. This aim was projected to be achieved through the following research objectives:

1. To understand the concept of balance in the context of the work-family interface as experienced by career Omani women.
2. To explore issues surrounding internal environment that affects and contributes to their work-family balance experience.
3. To explore issues surrounding the external environment that affects and contributes to their work-family balance experience.
4. To explore whether an intensive case study of career Omani women can take forward a deeper understanding of how they strike a balance of work-family commitment and if appropriate to represent this process through a suitable model.

1.7 Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do career Omani women define and perceive balance in the context of work-family interface?
2. What are the surrounding issues concerning the internal environment that facilitate and impede their attempt to achieve work-family balance?

3. What are the surrounding issues concerning the external environment that facilitate and impede their attempt to achieve work-family balance?
4. How do career Omani women manage their work-family balance?

1.8 Definitions

The concepts of work, family, and balance are a cultural construct. The concepts used in the study, therefore, are as defined suitable with Omani context.

1.8.1 Definition of Work and Family

Although it has been argued that a lot of unpaid work is done alongside the paid one, thus blurs the division between paid work and work that occurs in the family domain (Kanter, 1977; Barnett and Baruch, 1985), this study restricts the term '*work*' to refer to paid work, which is defined as '*instrumental activities that provide goods and services to support life*'.

Family is generally understood as a unit consists of those individuals that one is related to through biological ties, marriage, or adoption. While to individualist societies family may exclusively refer to nucleus family members, some cultures, particularly those of collectivist societies, the family includes extended family members as well. In reference to Omani culture as the context of the study, '*family*' refers to '*both nucleus and extended family members*'.

1.8.2 Perspectives on Balance and Definition

Work-family balance is a distinctive perspective in work-family literature. It emerged as a synthesis of conflict and enrichment perspectives. Conflict perspective highlights negative outcomes of the work-family interface where having multiple roles results in conflict due to scarce resources (Goode, 1960; Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). Enrichment perspective, on the other hand, suggests that resources are not necessarily depleting; they might be expanding as well (Rothbard, 2001; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; McNall *et al.*, 2010). Balance perspective portrays a fuller picture of the work-family interface by acknowledging the co-existence of both conflict and enrichment (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2003; Grzywacz and Bass, 2003; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007; Carlson *et al.*, 2009). Rather than a linking mechanism between work and family, work-family balance is a reflection of an overall assessment of compatibility between work and family roles (Allen, 2013).

The dynamic conception of balance has continuously made the term ‘work-family balance’ as ‘one of the most challenging concepts in the study of work and the study families’ (Clark, 2000, p.748). There are three reasons for this. First, the topic has been studied through various disciplines resulting numbers of terminology and conceptions (Runtě, 2009; Wada *et al.*, 2010). Second, considering gender as a social institution, work-family balance as perceived by women is definitely dissimilar than the way men perceive it (Gerson, 2004). Third, each word is a cultural construct, where work and family imply distinctive meanings across cultures hence various notions of what balance is (Zaynab, 2005; Carlson *et al.*, 2009; Hofstede, 2011).

This study, therefore, does not adopt the existing definition of work-family balance lest it would fail to describe the realities of Omani work-family experience thus misconstruing their meaning of balance. Considering motherhood and wifhood the two primary roles and identities of women in this society (Eickelmann, 1993; Chatty, 2000; Drysdale, 2010), ‘*balance*’ is defined as ‘*a state where a professional role is compatible and/or does not impede the performance of mother and wife*

roles'. Underpinned by balance perspective, 'work-family balance' implies the positive as well as negative experiences experienced by the participants in juggling the family role and professional role.

1.8.3 Definition of Omani Career Women

Omani career women' refers to '*Omani female nationalities that are qualified, and engaged in a paid job or a career*'.

1.9 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted by using English as the main medium of interaction, and by referring to references mainly written in English. The selection of the participants was also limited to those who are able to converse in English. Other than that, as much as I wished to have more conversational partners from a vast variety of careers, the intimate nature of the study, and sensitivity of the topic had made many women I approached hesitant to participate as conversational partners. In addition to that, I believe that the fact that English is not their first language has somewhat posed a limit to their ability in expressing and articulating their thoughts and feelings.

1.10 Thesis Structure and Organization

This thesis is organised into eleven chapters. These first two chapters provide the background of the study, where the second focuses on Oman as its context. The third chapter is on the review of the literature, which details the selected theories of work-family interface. This third chapter also presents the theoretical framework of the study. The fourth chapter is on the study research methodology, while the fifth

chapter is on data analysis procedure. Chapter six is on the pilot study and the exploratory findings, followed by chapter seven which is on modus operandi of the in-depth interview. The findings of this in-depth interview are presented in chapter eight while the modus operandi and findings of informal interviews are presented in chapter nine. Chapter ten lays out the discussion of the key findings. The last chapter of this thesis, which is chapter eleven, puts forward recommendations and the overall conclusion.

1.11 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter serves as the backdrop of the qualitative study on work-family balance experience among career Omani women. It provides the background and the rationale of the study, the problem statement and the research significance. The study's aim and objectives, as well as the research questions, have also been explained. Apart from these, the main concepts in the study which are work, family, and balance have also been explicated. Relevant information on Oman as the context of the study will be presented in the next chapter.

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