

# Dual-role Women in Selangor: Work-family Conflict and its Impact on Emotional Well-being

<sup>1</sup>Siti Marziah Zakaria, <sup>2\*</sup>Noremy Md. Akhir, <sup>3</sup>Muhammad Izzat Ebrahim,

<sup>4</sup>Hawa Rahmat, <sup>5</sup>Suzana Mohd Hoesni

**ABSTRACT--***In this era of urbanization, women have to play roles equal to men especially in making a living to support their families while at the same time, they have to perform their responsibilities as mothers and wives. Subsequently, this situation affects the functioning of families these days. As a result, they are unable to spend enough time with their families due to working overtime or having to take their works home. This article explores work-family conflicts experienced by dual-role women in Selangor and assesses the impacts on their emotional well-being. Eleven (11) informants around Selangor were interviewed thoroughly using semi-structured interview questions. The informants were selected through purposive sampling method. Then, the data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis procedure. Results of the analysis showed that work-family conflict among women in the workplace was triggered by career challenges, lack of family time, and unsupportive spouse. The findings of this study can serve as guidelines and references to improve and upgrade the National Women's Policy. The findings of this study should also be noted by the Department of Labor, Human Resources Division, Training Unit, and others in drafting programs and formulating policies for married female employees.*  
**Key Words--***Dual-role women, emotional well-being, role conflict, social support*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing role of women is currently affecting family development in Malaysia. A study conducted on 954 respondents employed in various industries in Malaysia found that 63% of the workers did not spend enough time with their families due to heavy workloads. Some of them even worked overtime from two to three hours after the official working hours (Noraini & Nor Diana, 2015).

Therefore, they could not spend enough time with their families and 75% of them stated that their holidays were disturbed since they had to work overtime (Noraini & Nor Diana, 2015). This crisis has a profound effect on families, children, husbands, and society as a whole. For example, there was a case of a child jumping off the

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<sup>1</sup> National University of Malaysia

<sup>2\*</sup>Centre for Research in Psychology and Human Well-being, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia  
noremy@ukm.edu.my.

<sup>3</sup> National University of Malaysia

<sup>4</sup> Multimedia University

<sup>5</sup> National University of Malaysia

balcony of her home and it was discovered that she was left alone at home by her busy parents (Kohilah, 2015) and many cases of children involved in drug abused due to family problems (Rozmi Ismail, Nor Azri Ahmad, Fauziah Ibrahim & Salina Nen, 2017). It might also lead to the issue of broken marriage since women could not focus well on their families besides facing other issues such as stress and mental health problems (Francis & Gopinath Sangaran, 2015). This situation also indirectly affected the organizations where they worked. Kim Hye Hyung (2014) argued that work-family balance among employees was a key factor in achieving job satisfaction and improving organizational performance.

In regards to challenges in the workplace nowadays, employees were also exposed to role conflict (Muhamad Irwan, Wan Shahrazad & Mohd Shahfie, 2016). This conflict might occur when an employee was given a new task or responsibility which was not within his or her expertise. The process of adapting to the new scope of work to fulfil employers' and customers' satisfaction if not addressed well could create conflict and stress. In addition to the new job scope, family responsibilities including caring for ailing family members without assistance from caretakers and financial problems were also factors that made employees more prone to stress (Nur Saadah & Rusyda Helma, 2016). This conflict not only bothered their families, but it also affected their health and job performance (Retu Atheya & Renu Arora, 2014).

According to Muhammad Khalil et al. (2015), emotional disturbance at the workplace due to a busy work schedule would raise the issue of child neglect. Mothers who were too busy working might not be able to focus on the children, especially if they were still young or in their teenage years. This situation could increase the risk of involvement in juvenile crime and delinquency among the children of working mothers. In the meantime, working mothers were hoping to balance their time between families and careers so that nothing was left out while at the same time, they succeed in performing both roles. Work-family balance has been found to increase self-motivation and thus contributed to employees' high performance.

Previous studies also found that workload was a major source of work-family imbalance followed by role conflict. Retu Atheya and Renu Arora (2014) found two factors that affected work performance and determined the work-family balance achieved by the employees. The first factor was the career which could be broken down into the type of work, salary, employer, colleague, and work environment. The second factor concerned the individual himself or herself which included age, status, education, personality, and dependents. Both factors could affect the ability to balance work and family roles.

Women nowadays also need to work to earn a living for their families and to make ends meet, especially those living in big cities. Even so, society still expects women to continue fulfilling their roles as housewives. The increase in women's roles and responsibilities due to their working out of home was not compensated by a fair distribution of roles in managing the households (Duxbury & Higgins, 1994). Women were still expected to give a high commitment to their careers as much as men do while at the same time, they were also required to prioritise household chores (Duxbury & Higgins, 1994). This situation certainly put a lot of pressure on women.

Thus, looking at the numerous effects of role conflict on women, this article will examine the impact of role conflict on the emotional well-being of dual-role women in Selangor. An analysis of the experiences of role conflict and the impact on emotional well-being will provide input to relevant parties to formulate policies to preserve the well-being of women.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Locations of the study***

This study selected several locations around Selangor where informants worked in government departments, private companies, full-time businesses or were bound by employment rules with any company registered under the Companies Commission of Malaysia. Selangor is one of the fastest-growing states in Malaysia and offers tremendous employment opportunities in both the government and private sectors. The cost of living in Selangor is also increasing, thus requiring women to work to help husbands support their families.

Selangor is divided into nine (9) districts namely Gombak, Hulu Langat, Hulu Selangor, Kuala Langat, Klang, Kuala Selangor, Petaling, Sabak Bernam, and Sepang. It is Malaysia's most populous state, contributed by the country's largest conurbation, the Klang Valley. Selangor's geographical position which is in the heart of Peninsular Malaysia contributes to the rapid development of the state as Malaysia's economic and transportation hub.

This location is also in line with the title of the study selected by the researchers who aim to explore the emotional well-being of women in Selangor as it is now one of the fastest-growing states in Malaysia and will have a huge impact on the lives of the women in that state. So, the researchers believe Selangor is a suitable area for this study.

## **II. POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

The population of this study was composed of married working women (dual-role women) around Selangor. The sample population comprised eleven (11) married working women from several districts in Selangor. The selection technique employed was purposive sampling because this study set out certain criteria that needed to be fulfilled by would-be informants. The informants were selected directly according to the characteristics set by the researchers to meet the objectives of this study. The characteristics of the informants for this study were (i) women working in government agencies, private companies or running businesses full-time; (ii) married women with at least two children; and (iii) women aged from 30 to 50 years old.

## **III. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The researchers used the method of the semi-structured interview to obtain the desired data. Interviews were conducted by setting up appointments with the informants and providing them interview consent forms explaining the study and the ethics of confidentiality involved in the study. There were ten (10) key questions asked during the interview and additional questions were enquired in the event of new matters or issues considered important were

raised during the interview. During the interview, the main questions asked were formulated based on the research questions and they fulfilled the objectives of the study intended to be explored.

#### **IV. DATA ANALYSIS**

After the interviews have been transcribed, the researchers performed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis procedure to obtain the themes emerging from the raw data. This method of analysis was carried out as follows:

1. Interview transcripts were read several times to gain an overview of the interviews and the condition of the informant. During this phase, a few notes were taken about the themes that would appear in the interview and associated with the interviewer's feelings and experiences.

2. The transcripts were then read again and the themes that existed were systematically identified and compiled.

3. Then, these themes were focused and defined in detail and consequently, the relations between those themes were examined. The focus was then shifted to the psychological content of the phenomenon in the study and the data were minimized.

4. The related themes were restructured to form a consistent and meaningful statement that contributed back to the information that came from the respondents' own experience.

The analysis was conducted and compiled around themes derived from the transcripts rather than the researchers' initial predictions. In line with the study of this phenomenon, these themes would be linked again to existing literature and studies.

Findings of the Study and Discussion:

#### **V. BACKGROUND OF THE INFORMANTS**

Eleven (11) informants were directly involved in this study. All of them were women from the age of 30s to 50s. Eleven (11) informants lived in several districts around Selangor. All of them were working women either in the private or government sectors and have at least two children. The table below shows the basic information for the eleven (11) informants interviewed.

All informants were married women aged between the 30s and 50s. The informants lived in several districts around Selangor, including Rawang, Banting, and Seri Kembangan. All of them were full-time working women in the private or government sectors and have at least two (2) children. They held different positions ranging from the lowest level (cleaning workers) to the highest-level positions such as managers in the private sector and deputy directors in the government sector.

**Table 1:** Background of informants

Informant	Age	District	Number of Children	Career	Sector
1	45	Rawang	4	Manager	Private
2	53	Rawang	3	Factory Worker	Private
3	50	Rawang	8	Cleaner	Private
4	35	Bangi	5	Administrative Assistant	Government
5	39	Bangi	3	Assistant Manager	Private
6	50	Cheras	2	Deputy Director	Government
7	36	Rawang	4	Cleaner	Private
8	36	Kajang	4	Administrative Officer	Government
9	30	Banting	2	Laboratory Assistant	Government
10	34	Banting	3	Kindergarten Teacher	Private
11	41	Seri Kembangan	4	Legal Officer	Government

## VI. FACTORS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Work-family conflict can be triggered by numerous factors. It could be the internal or external factors. The external factor is the one that is difficult to be coped and controlled (Syarifah Farradinna & Fatimah Wati Halim, 2015). The in-depth interviews had revealed that most of the factors are external. These factors need to be intervened to protect career women emotional well-being. Work-family conflict may be worsened if the employers are not sensitive to the women welfare and the family is not supportive, thoughtful, and compassionate (Fatimah Omar et al., 2011).

According to Zulkarnaen Mora (2017), work-family conflicts were related to absenteeism, decreased productivity and organisational commitment, lack of life satisfaction, fatigue, stress, depression, physical illnesses, alcohol consumption, and tensions in the relationship between husbands and wives. Work-family conflicts among informants is triggered by these three (3) key factors, namely a) career challenges, b) lack of family time, and c) unsupportive spouse.

### *a) Career challenges*

All 11 informants have careers in different sectors and fields of work. However, not all women felt the career prospect that could provide them satisfaction and comfort due to factors such as new job challenges and burdens and having to bring work home.

New challenges and tasks emerged when these women were assigned new positions that challenged them mentally and physically. They were depressed because they needed time to learn new tasks compared to previous tasks they had performed over the years. As stated by the 6th informant:

Now I am feeling so stressed out and the work is more hectic compared to before, there is so much work especially in the investigation department, so many money laundering cases in this division and I am not familiar

with them, banking, accounting, things like that are not in my expertise, so I have to start it all over, it is difficult.(Informant No. 6)

Informants were not only depressed because they received job scopes which they were not interested but they also have to learn from the beginning in several areas where they lacked expertise and skills. The same applied to informants who were assigned new tasks although they did not like those tasks at all. As stated by the 11th informant:

I feel stressed when I have to do something I don't like, compared to what I have done previously. I would prefer to handle criminal cases rather than working in the advisory division as I do now, I mean, even though I have been in the service for 12 years, when I was transferred here, I felt lost, I didn't know anything and I had to learn from the beginning. (Informant No. 11)

Some women felt depressed because of the increasing scope of work. As stated by the 4th informant:

Working as an administrative assistant these days, talking about challenges, yes there are challenges, especially our work in UKM is increasing, a wider scope and more work, so it is very challenging now and being a wife and a mother, my time with the children is sometimes quite limited.(Informant No. 4)

In addition, the researchers also found that salaries, promotions, and workloads were contributing factors to conflict among dual-role women. As stated by the 8th informant, "There are times when it doesn't only happen here, if we work elsewhere, sometimes we feel dissatisfied about a lot of things, it can be salary, promotion, things like that, workload, we certainly will feel burnout."

Not only that, tasks that were physically and mentally challenging and required courage also caused women to spend more energy and required them to be more alert at the workplaces compared to their homes. As stated by the 3rd informant:

It is hard, the places that we go seem like lacking in maintenance, when we get there, we clean the drains, staircases, besides there are not many people living in the places we go, like there are only 4 families in one particular block, in another block there is only one family, some blocks don't have any resident, quite creepy...

The situation faced by the 5th informant was a little different from what experienced by the 3rd informant because although the former's working hours were over, she still needed to be in standby mode at home if emergency cases like accidents involving students, services, and infrastructures arose. As stated by her:

The work I am doing now has huge responsibilities, being an assistant dorm manager, I manage student affairs, college administration, college maintenance, that's my real job, I am managing maintenance works, all things related to student affairs...(Informant No. 5)

The endless workload was also a reason why informants had to bring their work home. The researchers found that five out of 11 informants interviewed had to do it and this situation was explained by the 11th informant:

So far, I have to take my work home, it wouldn't get done at the office and I have to take them home, it takes about one to two hours to get the work done, sometimes I would start working on the task after my children have

gone to sleep, usually I wouldn't work on it if they were still awake, I would arrange a schedule so the work wouldn't interfere my time with family...(Informant No. 11)

The excessive workload in the office underlay the informant's decision to take it home. The informant had to fulfil her responsibilities to her children first and then, she woke up at 2 a.m. to complete her work. Besides, some informants needed to get their work done quickly since they must be used immediately in teaching sessions. The 11th informant stated:

Usually, at the beginning of the year, (we) focus more on preparing teaching aids since there are no books at the beginning of the year, so, we have to come up with a game, do a fun activity for the children, (so they) won't come to school crying, (about) 4 to 5 years old and still thinking of their homes, thinking about their mums, all of them don't want to come to school again, so we have to create an interesting idea, when we take it home, takes a long time to get it done.(Informant No. 10)

#### ***b) Lack of family time***

After discussing career, time allocation is very closely related to the role conflict that women face today. Worsening time crisis or constraint can cause their children to be neglected, having limited time with their husbands, and even no time to spend with their families.

Women these days are struggling to balance their roles either at work or at home. There were three (3) informants who admitted to neglecting their time with the children because they wanted to focus on their careers. As stated by the 2nd informant:

My husband works there too, I also don't have the time to monitor their performance, but I know when we are too busy, the kids will be neglected because my second child is capable but because I am too busy, taking orders for cakes here and there, he becomes neglected and his performance has dropped.(Informant No. 2)

Since the informant was too busy working, her children's education was neglected. The performance of her children deteriorated because the informant was too busy to spend time with her children. The same situation applied to a woman who delegated the responsibility of educating the kids to her more matured children. The 3rd informant stated, "*When they were doing their homework, they would ask about things they didn't know, so usually they would ask their sister, if they asked me and I didn't know the answer, they would contact their sister or the tutor through WhatsApp.*"

The situation was different for the 8th informant where although the husband was an academician, he handed over the task of educating the children completely to her. However, the informant was busy working too so she sometimes was unable to spend time with their children even during the examination period. As stated by the 8th informant:

Sometimes it is undeniable, sometimes when they are having the examination, I am busy that I don't have time to monitor them, OK, to be honest, when it comes to academics, the burden is more on me although their father is an academician too.(Informant No. 8)

The next issue raised by the researcher was limited time with husbands due to the responsibilities abided by working women. This was proven by the 8th informant where her husband had alerted her to reduce her workload, "He has given a hint for me to slow it down a bit when I was too busy." (Informant No. 8)

Informants who were too exhausted had to limit their time and activities with their family. Sometimes informants could not control their emotions when they were too tired. This could lead to quarrels and conflicts in marriage. Some informants reported that their husbands told them to quit their jobs due to the time constraint they faced to prepare meals, take care of the children and run household chores. Therefore, the informants have come to an agreement with her husband. As stated by the 7th informant:

Sometimes my husband discouraged me, quite difficult for me to apply for a job, my husband raised questions about who would prepare his meals, take care of the children, if those things were taken care of, then there would be no problem, but if I went to work, there would be no time to take care of the house, cook the meals and all that, but after that, I discussed with him, made a deal with my husband, if I wanted to work, there was no objection ermmm but I have to come home during the lunch break at 1 p.m. to cook. (Informant No. 8)

### *c) Unsupportive spouse*

It has been the norm for women to take on the responsibility of managing household matters. According to Noor Rahamah (2012), career women experienced various problems in executing their duties at home and in the office. Husbands' awareness is also essential in helping women to manage children and homes. However, the researchers discovered the sharing of duties did not materialise which in turn, caused the imbalance of work at home and made the wives incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities.

The researchers have found that most women have to do all the work at home by themselves without any help from their husbands. To make it worse, the wives have to work and take care of the children. As stated by the 8th informant:

My husband is kind of busy because he is working at a tuition centre, I can tell he is at home during the night only twice a week, he has his work to do like teaching or attending meetings at his tuition centre, a lot of things to do, so he is actually busy, sometimes I have to do certain courses on my own, of course, sometimes I feel so tired..(Informant No. 8)

The husband was too busy working so he had no time to help his wife at home. The informant sometimes grumbled to get her husband to help with household affairs and protested by not talking to him. The fact that husbands never helped their wives at home turned out to be the reason why women faced the struggle in managing all household matters. As stated by the 6th informant: *Ohhh, that was really never, hahaha, didn't expect him to do*

*that, but I did whatever I could, but he was not too demanding because he understood my work, he didn't do anything so he couldn't talk much about it."*

Sometimes the husband was helpful, sometimes he was lazy, he would only do it when I asked him, sometimes I was tired when I got home from work, seeing the pile of unwashed laundry, clothes still hanging on the clothesline, being there for two or three days, besides, I have to cook when I got home from work, but he got time to do it before going to work, more than I have, but he still expected for me to cook, do this or that, but it was all right, fine with me.(Informant No. 7)

In addition to the issue of unequal responsibility concerning housework, the researchers found that the husbands' lack of understanding towards working women could also be a factor that caused conflicts to erupt among husbands and wives. As stated by the first informant:

There was a divorce, we separated because my husband didn't give me his support, (since) I have a job, (so) he felt he didn't have to work, so it was hard for me to motivate myself, since the person closest to me didn't give me his support, so it was hard for me to get back on my feet, the children supported me but they were young and still didn't understand.(Informant No. 1)

The informant found that her husband did not understand why she came home late at night. She questioned her husband for failing to understand that she went to work because she wanted to support their family. The researchers also found that the husband argued why his wife had to take her work home. As stated by the 10th informant:

There was even a point where the husband said to me, "You are too busy, huh?", because being a teacher, I had to take my work home, I couldn't leave it at school after the work schedule ended at 3 p.m., whether I liked it or not, I could wait until the evening but I had something else to do, so I had to bring it home but sometimes I couldn't finish it, so sometimes I managed to do a small part of it but I couldn't finish the rest.(Informant No. 10)

Therefore, the relationship with their husbands was sometimes tense but luckily, their children also helped to reduce the burden of doing chores. As stated by the 4th informant, "*our relationship is OK but sometimes it can be stressful, but it is manageable, after that, we have been working together until now, my two children nowadays, Alhamdulillah, already know how to be independent, so there is less burden because they are also helping me.*

## **VII. THE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF DUAL-ROLE WOMEN**

The pressures faced by dual-role women coming from various aspects such as challenging work environment, coping with diverse human whims, children with developmental issues and stress at home have greatly influenced their emotional well-being. According to Sharifah Akmam Syed Zakaria and Ahmad Shukri Yahaya (2006), burnout are caused by a number of factors like heavy workload and stress, poor relationships with co-workers, personal or family problems, lack of tolerance and cooperation, poor working environment, and others.

As in the case of one informant in the study, the remote location of her workplace caused her to feel very stressful. The informant experienced extreme fatigue that could lead to accident while commuting from the

workplace to home. Besides, the babysitter's house was also far from her workplace and home. As stated by the 10th informant:

I teach at Bandar Baru Klang, quite far from where I live, I live in Teluk Panglima Garang, takes time to commute since I have to send my child to Jenjarum. So, driving up north to Teluk Panglima Garang then I go to the place where I teach and it is like doing a U-turn, that's the main problem, I have to rush early in the morning, once I was sleepy and almost had an accident. (Informant No. 10)

Being away from family also disturbs the emotions of dual-role women. This situation can lead to emotional distress as they are often concerned about the well-being of the family they leave behind. However, they have to work to survive and to fulfil family needs. In reality, informants were more concerned with their responsibilities towards their families rather than their responsibilities for work. Dual-role women seem burdened with the responsibility of seeking sustenance for their families while at the same time taking care of their welfare and affairs.

Other informants did also complaint for not having "me time" for themselves. They are very busy with their work schedules and family affairs. Most of their time has been spent on working and managing their families. This scenario is not healthy for their emotional development as this could lead to burnout, anxiety, and stress. They have less quality time to get rest and have a tight sleep. Some of them forget their healthy food and physical exercises to maintain healthy body and mind due to hectic schedule.

In fact, women between the age of 30s and 50s are critically busy with housekeeping and career. Most women in this age group are given various responsibilities and positions in the workplace because they are considered as highly experienced and have reached seniority in their respective fields (Noor Rahamah Abu Bakar, 2012). In terms of family, women in this age group witness their children grow up and turn to teenagers. Most of them have children in primary or secondary schools. Thus, they need to closely monitor their children activity, need to ensure their children safety and health, as well as their academic performance at school. Informants admitted that they became short-tempered due to fatigue and exhaustion. The stress at workplace had sometimes been transferred to home. They realized it was detrimental to the family harmony. As reported by one of the informants:

Now I can control my emotions after I get home from the office, not much effects if I take my emotions home but physically, I see some changes on him, that's what I see now, emotionally, I can't control it because I am so tired, sometimes when I can't handle it, I will let him know in advance. (Informant No. 6)

They should focus more on their children due to the importance of their academic achievement along with their personality and moral development. Growing teens should be monitored for their whereabouts and activities. They face a variety of moral and criminal threats out there. Therefore, the responsibilities of dual-role women are not over yet after office hours. Once they get home, they have to change their hats to the roles of wives and mothers. They need to monitor their children's schoolwork as well as doing household chores at home (Noor Rahamah Hj. Abu Bakar, 2012).

Hence, these diverse and exhausting roles pose a threat to the emotional well-being of dual-role women. They are very exhausted physically and psychologically. They try to hold on and be strong for the sake of their children

and families. However, many of them have shown symptoms of depression, stress, burnout, and others. They should be aware of these symptoms and get treatment immediately. Their lives need to be balanced so that their families and careers are in harmony. They also need to give themselves some time off. Hence, husbands and children have very important roles in understanding their wives and mothers. Support from the family will certainly help those women who face conflicting roles, as well as tolerance and compromise from their employers.

## SUMMARY

To conclude, the dual-role women studied have a variety of risk factors that can threaten their emotional well-being. Apparently, the work-family conflict has had a significant impact on the emotional well-being of dual-role women. Work-family conflict can be a risk factor for mental health problems if not addressed immediately. Other risk factors such as distant workplaces, excessive workload, lack of social support, living apart from children, and daily hassles can lead to mental disorders such as stress, depression, and anxiety. These risk factors need to be controlled or minimized so that dual-role women can continue to function as wives/mothers and mentally healthy workers. The findings clearly showed that they had complained of being tired, depressed, lost in focus, anxious, and worried. This is a threat to their emotional well-being that needs to be treated and dealt with promptly. Agencies and related units need to be aware of this issue and formulate more women-friendly policies so they can continue to contribute towards the prosperity of this country.

## VIII. APPRECIATION

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