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A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH TO THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF WORKING MOTHERS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Working mothers in Pakistan have not been extensively researched despite organizations globally facilitating their needs. This study explores the effects of compressed work scheduling, childcare support, and leave policies on the work-life balance of working mothers, grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which posits that organizational behaviors influence employee-supervisor relationships. The sample consisted of 540 mother employees from Karachi, with data collected through online and printed survey questionnaires and analyzed through Smart please using the Sturectual equation model. The analysis revealed significant relationships between compressed work scheduling, leave policies, and work-life balance, with beta values of -0.136 for compressed work scheduling and 0.298 for leave policies, indicating their importance. However, childcare support did not show a significant effect on work-life balance, as reflected by a beta value of 0.014. These findings underscore the urgent need for organizations to implement effective compressed work scheduling and improved leave policies. To foster a better work-life balance for working mothers, this study recommends that organizations enhance support, restructure policies to meet diverse needs and adopt flexible work-life balance initiatives. Such changes could lead to a more supportive environment, ultimately benefiting both employees and the organizations they represent.

Keywords: Compressed Work Scheduling, Childcare Support, Leave Policies, Work-Life Balance, Social Exchange Theory.

Introduction

In the modern workplace, a rare family-friendly culture and different family-friendly policies are now well-thought-out measures for creating a healthy work atmosphere (Feeney et al., 2019). Every organization or institution follows some evident values, attitudes, internal relationships, and external policies, where the link between them gives it a more specific image in society (Ilijana & Bojadziev et al., 2019).

Despite massive hard work on gender discrimination control and substitute fairness in the workplace, research by (Durbin et al., 2017 Conley & Page, 2017; Kelan, 2017) depicts that discrimination still occurs, precisely due to less improvement in women's job realization and its progress in the organization.

School teachers these days are much more educated and more adaptable and are observing association. There are more women, mothers, single parents, and somewhere, both parents are working to meet their increasing family needs. Along with vast stages of

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modernization, enhanced competencies and globalization have made another reality for the work setting, where the workers are undergoing problems with adjusting to the other workers. Office workers work for 40 long hours per week and even at their homes to complete pending tasks, and even till the end of the week, they have to make much effort to meet deadlines. Apparently, a significant number of professionals are into work, and life apart from work is an "immaculate web" where the job is both an occupation and a deviation from life.

The idea of work-life balance is now becoming a regularly talked about subject; several people now admit that balance is a gender-specific discussion of the work-life balance that will produce disheartened and dissatisfied workers.

Workers' satisfaction is highly influenced by organizational support, such as supervision, bonds, and the atmosphere and ethos of the work environment. The concept of 'Work-Life Balance' was employed in the late 1970s to depict the unity between a person's work and family life. The difference in the types of work settings after the mechanical upset during the last half of the 18th century furnished an added look to the idea of work-life balance (Joseph & Nancy, 2020).

Work-family-related problems are much more important for private schools to reflect upon due to changes in the nature and structure of the workforce, and it seems to continue to keep changing much more in the years to come. Women, specifically mothers, are entering the global work environment rapidly. However, working mothers from developing countries like Pakistan have limited resources to initiate their careers. In an underdeveloped country like Pakistan, a patriarchal society is still prevailing. Women, specifically mothers, are still considered only homemakers instead of breadwinners for their families; this idea is still in its embryonic state.

Nonetheless, many women have pulled these thoughts to pieces and have entered the job market, as the country’s economy has become very disturbed. As most women join challenging professions and take a more significant share in accomplishing domestic errands, the pressure of dealing with a whole lot and getting it accurate compromises the comforts of the private life and society overall. It highlights the significance of work-life balance in the view of businesses, government, and individuals’ lives to take interest now (Shabir et al., 2020).

Problems related to work-life balance (WLB) practices in contemporary establishments reveal a standard change that not only narrates the challenges of mingling work and domestic attention but also enhances the status of workers ‘personal life roles, for instance, their community relations, elderly care, individual standards, freedom and an ongoing process of aging. Even though businesses and human resources (HR) experts have drawn their consideration, with several parallel and integrated WLB practices with comprehensive and more planned professional objectives, balanced work and personal responsibilities related decisions are indeed constructed upon personal choices and contemporize a critical apprehension in Pakistani context (Shabir et al., 2020).

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Rationale of the Study

The increasing participation of women in the workforce in Pakistan has brought attention to the challenges faced by working mothers in balancing their work and family responsibilities. Balancing work and family life is crucial for the well-being of both the mothers and their families. However, there is a lack of quantitative research explicitly focusing on the work-life balance of working mothers in Pakistan. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by employing a quantitative approach to examine the work-life balance of working mothers in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

The work-life balance of working mothers is a critical issue in Pakistan due to the traditional gender roles and cultural expectations placed on women, coupled with the demands of modern employment. Balancing work and family responsibilities can lead to stress, burnout, and negative impacts on both work and family life. However, there is a shortage of quantitative research exploring the specific factors affecting the work-life balance of working mothers in Pakistan.

Research Question

1. What are the factors influencing the work-life balance of working mothers in Pakistan?

Research Objective

- This paper aims to examine the impact of compressed work scheduling, childcare support, and leave policies on the work-life balance of working mothers.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide a structured approach to understanding the relationships between variables in research studies. In the context of examining the work-life balance of working mothers in Pakistan, the theoretical framework includes three independent variables: compressed work schedule, childcare support, and leave policies, with work-life balance as the dependent variable. Compressed work schedules involve condensing work hours into fewer days per week, allowing more time for family and personal activities. Childcare support encompasses assistance in caring for children while mothers are at work, such as access to daycare facilities or flexible childcare arrangements. Leave policies refer to the availability of maternity leave, parental leave, and other forms of leave, offering flexibility for mothers to manage work and family responsibilities. It is hypothesized that these independent variables positively influence work-life balance. For example, access to compressed work schedules allows mothers to allocate more time for family activities. At the same time, childcare support and leave policies reduce the stress of balancing work and family responsibilities. This framework guides the investigation into the factors affecting the work-life balance of working mothers in Pakistan (Adams, 2020).

Conceptual model

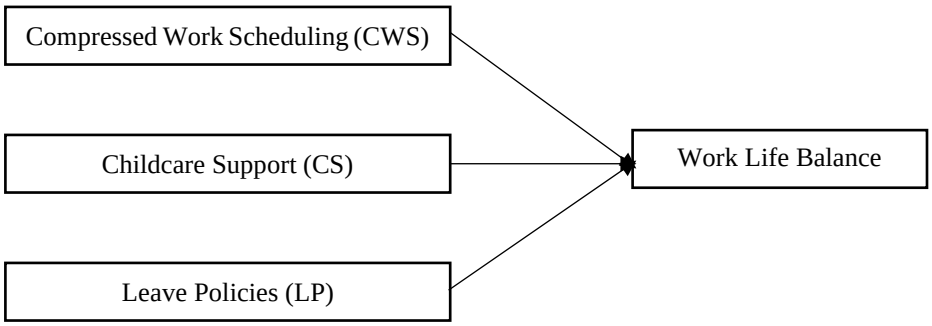


Figure: Relationship model of independent and dependent variable.

Literature Review

The relationship between employees and their organizations can be explained using Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This theory suggests that the bond between organizations and employees is a reciprocal exchange, where both parties engage in a give-and-take relationship (Aryee et al., 2002). Obrenovic, B., Du, J., Godinić, D., & Tsoy, D. (2022) further explain that this exchange involves complex interactions that require mutual terms, with the concept of reciprocity central to the connection between employees and organizations. Blau (2017) argues that Social Exchange Theory is based on the rule of mutual support, where employees and employers rely on each other to fulfill their responsibilities. The idea of reciprocity underpins the nature of the relationship between these two parties.

It is widely recognized that human psychology plays a significant role in determining organizational efficiency and performance (Kim et al., 2019). In modern times, private school employees are particularly conscious of receiving recognition for their work, not just through verbal praise but also through financial rewards. Their behavior is shaped by how they are treated (Allen et al., 2003; Tüfekçi, İ. 2022). This behavior aligns with the principles of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017), which emphasizes that both employees and employers adjust their actions based on the effort their counterparts are putting forth.

When the balance between an employee's contributions and the employer's rewards is maintained, the exchange becomes mutually beneficial, involving services and compensation (Aryee et al., 2002). According to Blau (2017), social exchange is initiated by the employer with the expectation of a reciprocal response from the employee. However, employees' reactions depend on how they perceive their employer—whether they see them as generous and deserving of appreciation (Al-Jabari et al.; I., 2019). In

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contrast, this reciprocal dynamic is less evident when employees are legally obligated to perform their duties, particularly when underperformance may lead to consequences.

Aryee et al. (2002) note that when management exhibits an envious attitude or takes employees for granted, resentment may arise, leading to negative behaviors. Uhl-Bien et al. (2003) describe how strained relationships between employees and management can result in employee retaliation, which impairs productivity. Employees often avoid directly addressing these issues, fearing it will make matters worse (Bavik et al., 2020); Tepper, 2000). Peng, Y., Ma, J., Zhang, W., & Jex, S. (2021) similarly found that harsh managerial behavior led to decreased morale and productivity, though it did not necessarily provoke retaliation. This demonstrates that employees' responses to unfavorable conditions may not always be straightforward.

Compressed Work Scheduling and Working Mothers' Work-Life Balance

Compressed work scheduling (CWS) has emerged as a significant workplace practice that allows employees to fulfill their job responsibilities within fewer days by extending daily hours. This scheduling model is particularly beneficial for working mothers, as it can enhance their work-life balance by providing them with additional time for family responsibilities. This literature review explores the relationship between compressed work scheduling and work-life balance for working mothers, highlighting key findings and implications from various studies.

Compressed Work Scheduling Defined

Compressed work scheduling allows employees to complete their weekly hours in fewer than the standard five days, often by working longer hours each day. For instance, a common arrangement may involve working four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days. Research indicates that CWS can lead to increased job satisfaction and lower stress levels, particularly for working mothers who seek to balance professional and domestic responsibilities (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Impact on Work-Life Balance

Numerous studies suggest that CWS positively affects the work-life balance of working mothers. By allowing for longer weekends or additional days off, CWS enables mothers to allocate more time to family activities, childcare, and personal interests (Rau & Hyland, 2002). This flexibility is crucial for mothers, who often juggle multiple roles as caregivers and professionals. According to Hill et al. (2008), the ability to manage work schedules according to personal and family needs significantly contributes to improved work-life balance among working mothers.

Moreover, CWS can reduce the guilt that many working mothers feel about not spending enough time with their children. With compressed schedules, mothers report feeling more in control of their time, which in turn enhances their overall job satisfaction and commitment to their employer (Blair-Loy, 2003). This increased satisfaction can lead to improved productivity and lower turnover rates, benefiting both the organization and its employees.

Despite its benefits, compressed work scheduling is not without challenges. Some studies highlight that not all organizations implement CWS effectively, leading to potential feelings of isolation or increased workload for employees (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Additionally, CWS may not be suitable for all job roles, particularly those requiring constant presence or teamwork, which can result in scheduling conflicts and communication issues (Gordon et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the success of compressed work schedules often depends on organizational culture and management support. Studies indicate that supportive management practices are critical for the effective implementation of CWS, as they help employees navigate challenges associated with longer working hours (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Compressed work schedules allow employees to complete their work in fewer days by extending their daily hours. For example, a traditional 9-to-5 worker might opt to work from 9 AM to 7 PM for four days a week, earning an additional day off. These scheduling options, including telecommuting or work-from-home arrangements, are particularly valued by women, especially working mothers.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: Compressed work scheduling has a significant effect on work-life balance for working mothers.

Childcare Support and Working Mothers' Work-Life Balance

Childcare support is essential in promoting work-life balance for working mothers. Research has shown that employers who provide resources to help employees manage family responsibilities often experience higher levels of employee satisfaction, motivation, and retention (Spector, 2022; Feeney et al., 2019; Cropanzano et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2021). As societal expectations increasingly demand that women fulfill multiple roles—including those of mother, homemaker, and professional—this dual burden can negatively impact their career advancement and overall well-being (Hossain & Rokis, 2014; Heesuk Yun, 2015). This literature review explores recent studies on the impact of childcare support on the work-life balance of working mothers, emphasizing the need for supportive workplace policies that address gender inequalities.

Societal Expectations and the Dual Burden

Women often face the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with the traditional expectations of motherhood and homemaking. Research indicates that this dual burden can hinder career growth and contribute to increased stress levels among working mothers (Hossain & Rokis, 2014; Heesuk Yun, 2015). Recent studies underscore that societal norms regarding gender roles can exacerbate feelings of guilt and inadequacy among working mothers, further complicating their ability to thrive in both spheres (Rim & Shin, 2022). For example, a study by Rim and Shin (2022) found that the stress associated with managing multiple roles often leads to burnout and decreased job satisfaction among working mothers.

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The Role of Childcare Support in Enhancing Work-Life Balance

Implementing childcare support policies is crucial for helping working mothers achieve a better work-life balance. Organizations that provide childcare resources, such as on-site daycare or financial assistance for childcare services, significantly reduce the stress associated with balancing work and family obligations (Spector, 2022; Feeney et al., 2019). A recent study by Reimann et al. (2022) found that when employers offer childcare support, working mothers report higher job satisfaction and engagement levels, leading to improved productivity and reduced turnover rates.

Moreover, childcare support initiatives can challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. By normalizing shared caregiving responsibilities, organizations can promote a culture of equity that allows women to advance in their careers without sacrificing family obligations (Bandelj, 2020). According to research by Gornick and Meyers (2021), countries with strong childcare support systems tend to have higher female labor force participation rates, emphasizing the importance of organizational policies that support working mothers.

Implications for Gender Equality and Organizational Outcomes

The positive impact of childcare support extends beyond individual mothers; it has significant implications for gender equality in the workforce. By providing resources that help mothers balance work and family responsibilities, organizations can help dismantle stereotypes that associate caregiving primarily with women (Bandelj, 2020). Recent studies suggest that organizations prioritizing childcare support experience not only improved employee morale but also enhanced organizational performance and innovation (Cropanzano et al., 2023).

For instance, research by Yu et al. (2021) highlights that employees who feel supported by their family responsibilities are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and loyalty to their employers. This relationship between childcare support and employee well-being underscores the necessity for organizations to develop policies that foster a supportive work environment for working mothers.

The following hypothesis is proposed:

H_2: Childcare support has a significant effect on work-life balance for working mothers.

Leave Policies and Working Mothers' Work-Life Balance

Leave policies, particularly maternity leave, are critical for supporting working mothers as they navigate the challenges of balancing professional responsibilities with family life. Maternity leave provides essential time for mothers to care for their newborns without the added stress of job insecurity. However, despite its importance, many working mothers face obstacles related to inadequate leave policies and persistent gender pay gaps, especially concerning parental leave (Gupta et al., 2006; Pettit & Hook, 2005). This literature review explores the significance of leave policies in shaping the work-life

balance of working mothers, emphasizing their role in promoting health, job retention, and overall well-being.

The Importance of Maternity Leave

Maternity leave is vital for the well-being of both mothers and their newborns. It allows mothers to recover physically and emotionally from childbirth while fostering bonding with their infants (Doepke et al., 2023). Research has shown that adequate maternity leave positively influences maternal mental health, reducing the likelihood of postpartum depression (Chatterji & Markowitz, 2005). In a study conducted by Jaumotte (2004), countries with more generous maternity leave policies reported higher levels of maternal satisfaction and improved child health outcomes. Furthermore, these policies contribute to women's long-term career advancement by enabling them to return to work without sacrificing family responsibilities (Pettit & Hook, 2005).

Gender Pay Gaps and Parental Leave

Despite the recognized benefits of maternity leave, gender pay gaps remain a persistent issue, particularly concerning parental leave. Women often earn less than their male counterparts, and this disparity is exacerbated when considering the time taken off for childbirth and childcare (Gupta et al., 2006; Pettit & Hook, 2005). Research indicates that when organizations offer paid parental leave, it can significantly enhance women's employment prospects and contribute to closing the gender pay gap. For instance, Han, Ruhm, and Waldfogel (2009) found that access to paid leave correlates with higher rates of female employment and increased earnings, ultimately supporting the financial stability of working mothers.

Impacts on Health and Employment Prospects

Organizational leave policies not only benefit individual mothers but also have broader implications for workforce participation and public health. Research by Chatterji and Markowitz (2005) highlights that supportive leave policies can lead to better physical and mental health outcomes for mothers, resulting in fewer sick days and increased job satisfaction. A comprehensive analysis by Doepke et al. (2023) underscores that nations with robust parental leave policies experience higher female labor force participation, showcasing the importance of such measures in promoting gender equality in the workplace.

Moreover, employers benefit from implementing supportive leave policies. Studies have shown that organizations that provide paid leave experience lower turnover rates and higher employee loyalty, ultimately resulting in cost savings related to recruitment and training (Pettit & Hook, 2005). This relationship emphasizes the need for organizations to recognize the strategic value of comprehensive leave policies in fostering a committed and satisfied workforce.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

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H_3: Organizational leave policies have a significant effect on work-life balance for working mothers.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to find and fill the gaps identified with the help of the literature reviews done to initiate this research and introduce the idea of studying the factors related to working mothers' work-life balance (WLB), which has always been affected by their work practices and family responsibilities and significantly less discussed in the context of Pakistan.

A self-administered survey was used in this study because of the practicality of this approach. Such a survey is the best method to integrate a significant sample to establish a sample depiction and generalize the results (May & Williams, 2002). This method also suited this research due to the low financial cost, time constraints, and lower skill requirements (Sekaran, 2000). Proper execution of this method can produce a high level of quality in survey data, and an 80-85% response rate can be achieved through this method (Burns & Burns, 2000).

This study collected data with the prior consent of the 540 respondents using a closed-ended questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was administered personally in 10 private schools and distributed proportionately based on the number of employees of every school to increase the possibility of the target contributors making an equal contribution.

Secondly, the researcher could clarify misunderstandings or answer questions about the questions the participants did not understand. Also, the researcher could encourage the contributors to share in the study and present their opinions individualistically (Saunders et al., 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Lastly, the hand delivery gave a better response rate. Furthermore, the hand delivery and collection methods are effective in the social order where the research values are unestablished (Jahangir, 2012). Asika (1991) revealed that the reply rate of mailed questionnaires was within the range of 3% and 4% in developing countries like Pakistan

Research Design

The present study examined the association between compressed work scheduling, childcare support, leave policies, and working mothers' work-life balance (WMWLB).

This study was correlational because it examined the relationship between the variables mentioned above. Correlational research can examine the associations between variables; thus, this design was well-matched with the purposes of this study (Fraenkel et al., 1993). This study studied the proposed relationship using a quantitative approach. A quantitative approach allows the research scholar to generalize the results over a sample from the population of the study, which is not used in the qualitative approach (Sekaran, 2000). The nature of this study was cross-sectional, and data was collected once and

analyzed through Smart PLS. This study was also conducted without the researcher's intrusion in a usual work situation.

Analyses and Interpretations

The study gathered data from 540 survey questionnaires, which 540 respondents completed. The demographic variables of the study include questions about marital status, parental status, working hours, and the nature of work of each respondent.

Table 01: Demographic Profile (n= 540)

Demographics	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status	Married	438	81.1
	Divorced	56	10.4
	Widow	46	8.5
Have Kids	Yes No	408 132	75.6 24.4
Family Structure	Single-Parent Family Two-Parent Family	116 424	21.5 78.5
Nature of Work	Online Premises Bound Hybrid	181 47 312	33.5 8.7 57.8
Working Hours	4-6 Hours 6-8 Hours 8-10 Hours	170 279 91	31.5 51.7 16.9

Measurement Model

The study used CFA and SEM to examine the model's adequacy and draw conclusions. In addition, measurement model assessment is done to ensure the construct's reliability and validity for its suitability for the path model (Henseler et al., 2015). For this reason, the current study used convergent validity and discriminant validity identified through Smart PLS.

Convergent Validity

Table 02: Convergent Validity

Variable	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Composite Reliability**	**AVE**
Compressed Work Scheduling	0.790	0.857	0.601
Leave Policies	0.663	0.812	0.592
Childcare Support	0.742	0.848	0.652
Work-Life Balance	0.841	0.893	0.677

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Path Analysis

Table 03: Path Analysis

Hyp	Relation	Beta Values	Mean (M)	SD	T Values	P Values	Decision
H_1	CWS > WLB	-0.136	-0.133	0.039	3.464	0.001	Supported
H_2	CC > WLB	0.014	0.003	0.052	0.266	0.791	Unsupported
H_3	LP > WLB	0.298	0.298	0.052	5.746	0.000	Supported

(Note: CWS= Compressed Work Scheduling, WLB= Work Life Balance, LP= Leave policies, CC= Childcare Support)

Conclusion

The study continues to emphasize the critical factors that affect working mothers. This study highlights the significant impact of compressed work scheduling, childcare support, and leave policies on these women's work-life balance.

The results of the path analysis indicate that while compressed work scheduling negatively affects work-life balance, leave policies have a positive impact. Specifically, the findings suggest that organizations need to be cautious in implementing compressed work schedules to avoid adverse outcomes. Conversely, the positive association between leave policies and work-life balance underscores the importance of supportive parental leave options. Such policies not only enhance the well-being of working mothers but also contribute to a more equitable work environment.

Although this study provides important insights into the factors influencing work-life balance, it also indicates that further investigation is needed. Future research should delve deeper into these relationships and develop comprehensive frameworks to better understand how these factors interact and affect working mothers. Creating a supportive environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by working mothers will be essential for their success both at home and in their careers.

Recommendations

Employers should consider implementing flexible work arrangements, such as compressed work schedules, telecommuting options, or flexible hours, to allow mothers to better balance their work and family responsibilities. Secondly, organizations should provide comprehensive childcare support, including onsite daycare facilities, subsidies for childcare expenses, and backup childcare options, to alleviate the burden of childcare responsibilities during work hours. Additionally, policymakers should enact and enforce laws that mandate paid maternity leave, parental leave, and other family-friendly leave policies to ensure that working mothers have the necessary time off to care for their families without risking their employment or financial stability. Furthermore, awareness and training programs should be conducted to educate both employers and employees about the importance of work-life balance and to promote supportive work environments for working mothers. By implementing these recommendations, employers,

policymakers, and society as a whole can contribute to creating a more supportive and conducive environment for working mothers to achieve a better work-life balance.

Managerial Implications

At present, many of the research groups continue their efforts on work-life balance, and enhanced understanding of the progressions and apparatuses through which these practices affect the work-life balance of working mothers is still in the early stage. This study exemplifies that the effects of compressed work scheduling, childcare support, leave policies, and high-involvement work practices play critical roles in defining work-life balance for a working mother.

Adequate training of supervisors at all levels must be ensured in all institutions, in the WLB context, to enable the organization to effectively run such programs and guarantee staff experience the benefits accompanying such programs. HR managers, who operate at a more distal level, also have the authority to impact employee WLB outcomes directly, as well as employee observations of organizational and supervisor supportiveness. It is essential, therefore, that HR managers, as well as supervisors, know the role each of them plays in affecting employee WLB.

This study also provides a foundation for more research on the complex effects of compressed work scheduling and childcare support on a working mother's work-life balance.

Lastly, our findings suggest that organizations and individuals can benefit from compressed work scheduling and high-involvement work systems. Still, close attention should be given to both enhanced childcare support and revised leave policies of the organization in order to improve the performance of a working mother.

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