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A Qualitative Exploration of Work-Life Balance: Experiences of Millennial Married Women Workers

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined Work-Life Balance (WLB) experiences of millennial married women workers in Bekasi area using a phenomenological study. Purposive Sampling techniques and semi-structured in-depth interview were used to gain depth into workers' understandings of work-life balance experiences. This study analyzed responses from 10 millennial married women workers in Bekasi area. Findings of this study identified 9 themes from the respondents' responses. Findings revealed that *Focus, Time management* and *Communication and Company/Supervisor and Family Support* themes have become dominant strategies for the respondents to manage their WLB and WLB conflict experience. These themes gleaned from this study are expected to be important and become a significant contribution to further research and practical knowledge for decision maker.

Keywords: Millennial, Work-life balance, Work-life conflict, Themes.

Introduction

Work life balance is a topic of great interest and a matter of high priority these days for at different level such as individual, organizational and government level sand research in these areas has helped in forming organizational and social policy in

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many countries. The need for work-life balance arises as a response to work-family conflict, which occurs when the requirements of personal role are mismatched with the ones of the productive role and vice versa. This conflict generates tension in individuals who bear exposure to an increased stress, reducing their productivity level and causing a negative impact on organizational performance (Iyer, 2017).

Economic pressures have led married women to enter the workforce in order to support their family needs. In fact, Research has also shown that the work family interface or interaction can have many consequences and can result in either work family conflict or work family enrichment (Nanjiani &. Dahlstrom, 2017).

Several experts argued that when married women workers can achieve a balance of work and family, it will be a benefit to many parties. For employee's side, he feel benefited (Prerna, 2012) since this condition is considered to contribute to each individual prosperity, good health and their society (Halpern, 2005). While, from an organization's side, WLB condition could build employees' commitment to their job (Marcinkus, Berry, & Gordon, 2006) productivity (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), and job satisfaction (Ellwart & Konradt, 2011). Meanwhile, from family's side showed that family prosperity (Greenhaus & Bass, 2003) and satisfaction for children prosperity (Milkie & Peltola, 2010) could occur.

Iyer (2017) stated that work-life balance is one of the main concerns of the so called "Generation Y" (born between 1982 and 2000), who value flexibility in time and space at work. This millennial generation dominates workforces in this period. Meanwhile, according to Shah (2017), millennial generations need attention because of their growing numbers in the workplace. In addition, Larasati, Hasanati and Istiqomah (2019) stated that Work-life balance (WLB) is very important to attach to millennial generations

Departing from above statements, this study is going to measure the understanding of WLB concept and its relations among millennial married women workers in Bekasi area, Indonesia.

Problem Statement

Economic pressures influenced married women to support their couple and participate in earning money for their family's needs. On the other hand, married women workers have also another responsibility to handle home's works and take care of their children. In the other words, a working married woman takes a double role at the same time (Handayani, Maulia, & Yulianti, 2012).

Keene and Quadagno (2004) argued that 60% of working adults indicated that they were difficult to achieve balance, especially working married couple whose children under 18 years old. In addition, for a working woman, basically the ability to balance roles in the family and work are of course influenced by the family environment and work environment (Handayani, 2013). This condition has become a challenging situation for married women to do their role not only as workers in a company but also as wife or mother at home.

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According to Shah (2017), millennial generations need attention because of their growing numbers in the workplace. Further, they are also different from prior generations. The best attraction and retention of millennial generations are very important for any business to maintain and to grow in the future.

Research Questions

To investigate a deeper insight of the phenomenon, the following research questions will be delivered:

1. How do millennial married women workers understand the concept of work life balance?

2. How do millennial married women workers balance their work life with their personal life?

3. How do millennial married women workers experience work life conflict and how can they overcome?

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate the understanding of WLB concept of millennial married women workers.

2. To investigate how millennial married women workers to balance their work life and personal life.

3. To investigate how millennial married women workers to experience and overcome work life conflict.

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to be significant to several reasons:

First, lack of study relating to WLB context in Bekasi area, so it will be expected to offer guidance for researchers for further study in this context.

Second, the result of this study is also expected to provide valuable information about employees' WLB for decision makers in industry, especially in Bekasi area.

Literature Review

The concept of work-life balance

Work-life balance, as a concept, was first discussed in the literature in the late 1970s (SHRM, 2003). Work-life balance (WLB) is two demands where work and one's life must be in line (Lockwood, 2003). Definition of WLB can be interpreted as the amount of time spent on doing a job compared to the amount of time spent with family and doing things they may enjoy (Meenakshi, Subrahamanyam, and Ravichandran, 2013).

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The dimensions of the concept of work-life balance have been influenced by the role of women in the workplace and their growing difficulties of meeting work- and non-work demands (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007). The definition of WLB can be interpreted as the amount of time spent on doing a job compared to the amount of time spent with family and doing things they may enjoy (Meenakshi, Subrahamanyam, and Ravichandran, 2013).

Authors (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007, Kosseck, Baltes & Matthews, 2011; Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2009) have expressed the view that work-life balance can be understood through a theoretical equilibrium between work- and non-work roles. By contrast, when work-life balance is dissected into its dimensions, it becomes clear that there is an opposing, dichotomous relationship that is, theoretically, incompatible. This suggests that neither work- nor non-work-related role satisfaction can be completely fulfilled because of an inevitable crossover of role-related duties. Role set theory suggests that people carry multiple roles, related to work (such as the role of a colleague) and non-work (such as the role of a parent) contexts.

Work-life conflict is a concept that constitutes a lack of balanced work- and non-work obligations. The manifestations of a lack of work-life balance have been debated in a related branch of the literature on worklife conflict (Kosseck, Baltes & Matthews, 2011; Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2009).

Lee and Steele (2009) stated that the research focus on the potential enrichment recognition among the multiple roles which may cause negative experience of WLB. Potgieter, and Barnard, (2010) said that although flexibility of work hours positively contributes to WLB, it is rather the quality of experience in different life spheres that is of value to participants. It depends on the kind of assessment Depending on their assessment of the outcomes and the perceptions from the respondent whether positive or negative about WLB.

Millennial Generation

Millennial generations are individuals born in the 1980s to 2000s. According to Langton & Robbins (2013), millennial generation is a generation who was worn between the year 1979 to 1994. In other words, Millennial generations use instant communication technologies such as email, SMS, instant messaging, and social media through Facebook and Twitter. In other words, millennial is the generation grows up in the booming internet era (Lyons, 2004). The characteristics formed in millennial generation are internet addiction, confidence, high selfesteem, open-mindedness, and tolerance for change (Kilber, Barclay, & Ohmer, 2014). Millennial generations have demands to have more flexible working hours as a source of their welfare (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). In addition, important factors for WLB of millennial generations are salaries, recognition of individuals, flexible work schedules, and career advancement (Huybers, 2011)

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative research is conducted in investigating a phenomenon. Many experts stated that methodologies in qualitative research refer to theories so that may vary the qualitative research design. This case study approach with semi-structured in-depth interview is used for this study in order to have better understanding of the effects of work-life balance on millennial married women workers in Bekasi. According to Denzin & Lincoln, (2003), A qualitative approach is epistemologically and methodologically relates to an interpretive paradigm, as it may supports the need of appropriate research method application to describe the condition of people's social life. Hence, it needs to be understood and appreciated.

Creswell (2003) argued that exploratory case studies do not try to generalize findings, but rather offer deeper situational understanding and validity. In investigating the understanding of Work-life Balance (WLB) concept, this study will be delivered 3 (three) questions to 10 millennial married women workers namely, (1) *How do you understand the concept of work life balance?, (2) How do you balance your work life with your personal life?, (3) How do you experience work life conflict and how can you overcome?*

Participants

The participants of this research were millennial married women employees who were born after 1980s and are working in Bekasi area. In collecting data, this study uses purposive sampling technique to select participants who are in accordance with the criteria of samples from the population. There are three criteria used to select samples from the population: (1) The employees are 18 to 39 years old, (2) Married with children, (3) and the Employees who have worked in the company for minimum 1 year.

Procedure

For assuring the validity of the question and data gathered for the actual study, firstly, there were four extracted questions delivered to 3 respondents as pilot interview. These extracted four questions were derived from the previous research in qualitative studies by several experts. After trying to question the respondents, there were 3 questions appeared through peer crosscheck for the validity.

Secondly, the three selected questions which were (1) *How do you understand the concept of work life balance?,* (2) *How do you balance your work life with your personal life?,* (3) *How do you experience work life conflict and how can you overcome?,* were delivered to 10 respondents from various industries in the area of Bekasi, Indonesia. Before the interview sessions were conducted, the respondents were already contacted and asked for their willingness to be the interviewee.

Thirdly, In the process of collecting data, the respondents were asked personally in 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded by electronic recorder and written in pieces of paper. The questions were sometimes delivered in English if the respondents understand and speak English, if the respondents speak in *Bahasa*, in order to make it easier and understandable, the questions were translated into *Bahasa*. All recorded and written data in *Bahasa* were then translated into English. Then all data in transcripts were

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analyzed one by one or case by case as Smith et al. (2009 said that all interpretations from the data were described in detail and from the individuals or respondents.

Results, Discussion and Limitations

Results

There were three questions delivered to the 10 respondents (100%). From the three questions, there were 9 themes, which are *Focus, Time Management, Priority, Professional, Commitment, Communication, Company/Superior Support, Family Support* and *Flexibility* identified through semi structured interview to the ten respondents as described in detail below:

1. How do you understand the concept of work life balance?

In responding to this questions, 5 themes have appeared, which are *Balance, Time Management, Priority, Focus* and *Flexibility.* 7 (70%) of 10 respondents defined WLB as *Balance,* 3 respondents (30%) of them as *Time Management* and 2 respondents (30%) besides defined as Balance, they also defined it as *Priority*, *Focus* and *Flexibility***.**

In the theme of *Balance*, one of the respondent stated,

"In my opinion, the balance of life is being able to manage, now I'm a housewife, can manage my family, how to work, how to be the mother of my child." (8)

She seemingly tries to manage her work at home as a wife and a mother and at workplace as an employee.

Another respondent said that WLB is not only about *Balance* but also about *Flexibility*, *Time Management* and *Focus*:

"In my opinion, balance dividing the time between work and personal life, has clear boundaries but remains flexible. Good at managing time and energy and thoughts to focus on the target that is being or will be achieved, but does not reduce the rights and obligations as a wife, mother and employee".(4)

Based on her statement, she tries to be professional in her role at workplace by managing her time proportionately between the two sides, at home and at workplace.

While other respondents stated, WLB is about *Priority*, as they said,

"Work is not neglected, on target. Family still gets the maximum portion, like a family in general" (10)

"So if you become a housewife, you must prioritize family, children and home activities".(2)

Although some respondents have tried to be professional at workplace but they also realized that they have to prioritize their family somehow.

Hence, in defining and understanding the WLB, the respondents did not come to one word only but also used several terminologies.

   2.   How do you balance your work life with your personal life?

From the 10 (100%) respondents' responses. 6 themes were identified, which are *Focus, Time Management, Communication, Superior's* and *Family's Support, Commitment,* and *Priority*.

In responding the second question, *Focus* theme was identified. Among 10 respondents, 5 (50%) of them stated that in order to balance their work life and personal life, they tend to focus in handling their work at work place and at home as well in other words, they have to be smart in managing time.

As they said,

"At work, minimize personal relationships for all activities. In contrast to the matter of personal life, minimizing everything related to work. For example do not read WA work groups during rest at home". (1)

"..I have to focus on work from 8 am - 5 pm and after that, the rest of the time there is an obligation to take care of family, children, etc. So the point is we have to be smart to manage or divide time according to work and life to be balanced. (2)

Second theme is about *Time Management*, 2 (20%) of the respondents stated that they have to be able to manage their time in order to balance their work life and their personal life, as they said,

"..So you have to consider the time or manage the time, between the time at home and the time at work / office must be balanced…" (2)

"…Must be able to manage time.(8)

Among the 10 respondents, 2 (20%) of them surprisingly stated building a good *Communicatio*n is the way for them to balance their work life and personal life, as they said,

"…I communicate, WA, telephone, with my child also. At a rest time, I also call again, communication should run smooth.."(8)

"…With the current technology, from the office I can monitor the condition of children with babysitter, and communicate everything. And when at home, if you can complete the task through mobile communication, can also be completed.."(10)

As a part of their effort to balance their life, they use communication devices in order to control or monitor their children at home.

The third theme of the respondents' responses is *Superior's and Family's Support.* 4 (40%) respondents stated that their superiors at workplace and families support them to balance their work and personal life. They stated that,

"..Even if for example there is work that I have to finish at home, I finish after the child sleeps or, if the father is home, his child plays with him first, then I do work.."(5)

"I Alhamdulillah rarely have problems because my husband also understands me. So we understand each other, my husband is also on the shift.."(8)

Another respondent also said,

"...everything is supported and cooperated with my husband, as well as prepare my husband's needs." (10)

They are successful to manage their WLB since their family or partner understand and support them. In addition, not only by their family or partner, they also have support from company through their superior with their policy to help their workers balance their life, as one respondent said,

"...Given the facilities there are also binding rules. Women can use their working hours for breastfeeding, facilities for breastfeeding are also provided..."(9)

The fifth theme is *Commitment.* 2 (20%) of the respondents said that they have to show their *Commitment* in order to help them balance their work life and personal life, as they said,

"...I have a commitment, I have an obsessions as a wife, and a career for women,..." (9)

"....We should be responsible for the profession, as a good mother and responsible worker."(10)

Based on their responses, the some respondents stated that their experience in balancing their life will be no problem as long as they have *Commitment* to do their work at workplace as a worker and at home as a housewife.

The last theme which was identifies is *Priority.* 1 (1%) of the respondents stated that she has to take priorities rather than do the whole things. As she said,

"...Set priorities, which should take precedence between work priorities and family priorities without reducing attention to the family." (4)

3. How do you experience work life conflict and how can you overcome?

In responding the third question, there were 6 themes identified, which are *Priority, Professionalism, Family Support, Company Support, Time Management, and Flexibility*.

Four (40%) of the respondents declared that *Priority* has to be considered in order to overcome work life conflict, as they said,

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Depending on the conditions, if work matters are negotiated, then prioritize personal matters. Vice versa. No need to force the will.(1)

So far, for me, the first, if I ask for help from my family or husband to handle my children. If the work is not urgent, I prioritize family. Family first.(3)

"Prioritize family. If you can't handle work at home, cook or clean up, you can ask someone to help.."(9)

I will try to maintain my commitment as a mother and keep balancing with work responsibilities..(10)

From the respondents' responses, they described that in certain condition and when the conflict of interest exists, their family is the priority although they have to try to balance their life.

The second theme is *Professional.* Among the respondents, the other 3 respondents (30%) declared that they can overcome their WLB conflict through *Professionalism* as they mentioned,

"How to handle it in life and at work must be professional. When there are problems in the office we have to solve at work and when there are problems at home also must be resolved at home."(2)

"In principle, I have separated personal life from work. When there are problems with my personal life they won't affect my performance, and vice versa." (4)

"If it's time to work then work seriously defer work outside of work and vice versa.."(7)

The third theme is *Company/Superior Support.* There are two respondents who responded that they can overcome their WLB since their companies/superiors where/with whom they work support them to balance when the WLB conflict happens to them. They stated,

"*I chose to get permission to work a day to accompany my child to the doctor..(6)*

Another respondent said that her boss supports her to cope with her WLB conflict, as she said

"My boss is fair, as long as we don't have work that is pending and urgent and can still be pending, superior will not forbid us to use our leave rights.(9)

On the other side, the fourth theme was identified which is *Family Support.* The respondents said that besides they get support from their company/superior, their family also support them, as they said,

".,if I ask for help from my family or husband to handle my children."(3)

"I usually ask my mother to come to take care of my kid."(5)

The fifth theme is *Time Management*. 2 (20%) of the respondents claimed that they were able to overcome their WLB conflict since they were good at managing their time, as one said,

"There is a time to work there is a time to relax with Family or friends. There is a time to behave and act seriously and there is also a time to relax and have fun with family"…(7)

Another respondent said,

"…work at the office at working hours, why bring home. If at home, for the family. So if the work is piling up, the business is done at the work place, not to be brought home."(9)

It seems that any problem that may occur in WLB conflict could be reduced by their ability to manage their time.

The last theme which was identified is Flexibility. One respondent stated,

"...if my child is sick and does have to go to the doctor, I remain at home, my office work is handled from home. (5)

This condition enables her to handle her WLB conflict when something happens at home and makes her stay and no need to come to her workplace.

Discussion

This study investigated millennial married women workers in Bekasi, Indonesia. The issue of WLB becomes an interested issue since the focus of WLB research on married women, dual career couples and single parent household (Van Aarde & Mostert, 2008). The role of married women and dual career couples is very challenging in managing their WLB in their activities. If they are not aware of managing this issue, as their multiple roles, it may cause negative experience of work–life balance. (Lee & Steele, 2009)

Based on the result of this study, millennial married women mostly are familiar with the concept of WLB. Most of them have tried to focus and manage their time in coping with this WLB experience. Among 10 respondents, 5 of them stated that *focus* has become their strategies in handling their WLB experiences. While, *time management* was dominantly discussed in their responses to address the way to balance and also overcome their work life and personal life conflict. On other hand, this fact is contrary to Roberts (2007) in his study, he said that *time management* alone and the division of time are not adequate anymore in addressing the concept of WLB.

Surprisingly, the 4 (40%) respondents of this study in coping with WLB conflicts, they frankly responded unbalance condition or made *priority* one side, where they prefer to prioritize their family than their work. Although 3 (30%) of them wanted to be *professional* in their career, but in certain condition, they mostly agreed that family is number one. As Watts (2009) in his study of women civil engineer, explained that it is

rather difficult for women to balance between their work life and personal life since women are expected more to take care of activities at home.

Besides the other themes which were identified in this study, *company/superior support* and *family support* are considered to be important in their contribution to help married women workers balance their work life and personal life. 4 (40%) of the respondents expressed that their success in WLB experience was also supported not only by company/superior at workplace but also by their family at home. This study result is in line with Batt and Valcour (2003) and Hauptfleisch and Uys (2006) studies which stated that supervisor could reduce strain and behavior which caused by work to-family conflict.

In the context of *commitment*, 2 (20%) of the respondents responded that they showed their commitment to their job as workers in order to motivate them to balance their work life and personal life. This commitment has become a signal for high responsibility for them to do their job. Similarly, Beauregard and Henry (2009) argue that employees with commitment to work will make them balance their work activities and non-work activities and will also be satisfied with their job.

One theme has made this study expectedly crucial is *communication*. 2 (20%) of the respondents claimed that they built good communication with their family members in order to maintain their WLB, especially WLB conflict. They tried to keep communicating with their partner and their babysitter at home in order to control their baby or children condition. This way has become an alternative for them to reduce their inability to stand by any time for their family members. This phenomenon can be a greater focus now for the researchers in this study to investigate and also for the married women workers in facing their multiple life roles and managing their personal and professional lives for the future (Simard, 2011)

Flexibility still becomes one of the themes identified in their responses. One respondent said that she could sometimes handle her work from home when she had to do it. This condition could help her to overcome WLB conflict experience. This is a friendly family policy from some companies in order to facilitate their employees to manage their work and family (Robbins et al., 2011). Potgieter and Barnard (2010) in their study found that flexibility of work hours has positive contribution to work–life balance,

Limitations

This study only investigates the work life balance experience of millennial married women workers in the area of Bekasi. This finding is expected to provide information about how the millennial married women workers experience in especially in the level of operators and staff only, so that the result may not be generalized. Since this is a qualitative study with purposive sampling technique and using semi structured interview technique in collecting data, the respondents were only limited to 10 married women workers whose ages are in the range of 18-39 years. Any potential bias may occur since some of the respondents are colleagues of the interviewer. However, the results of the interview were processed through validation from the peer and the interviewer.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study is expected to improve the WLB among millennial married women workers in Bekasi in coping with the WLB experience at their work and at home. This continuous process has become a challenge for the millennial married women workers to build their competence to manage their interaction between multiple roles.

Based on the themes identified, it can be concluded that millennial married women workers mostly have the same perception about Work Life Balance (WLB) concept in which they are intended to be able to manage or divide their time for their work life and personal life. In addition, in order to find ways to balance their WLB experience, this study crucially showed communication theme as one way for them to balance their work life and personal life. Although they cannot exist at home, at least they can control or monitor their children and keep a good relationship with their couple.

Based on this study, in overcoming the WLB conflicts, the respondents still assume that family is the priority, although they still try to do their best to be professional. When they have to choose in certain condition, they prefer to work at home since their companies or supervisors support them to do so. Hence, the concept of friendly family policies, one of them is telecommuting to be considered to have contribution to build WLB of multiple role couple workers. In other words, flexibility is needed to cope with WLB for millennial married women workers.

Besides the contribution to practical knowledge, this study is also expected to have contribution to build alternative themes of theoretical perspectives in WLB experiences and in the end to contribute to conceptual understanding of WLB. This study is also expected to provide valuable and practical information for human resources manager or leaders of companies in the area of Bekasi to accommodate suitable strategies to help their workers to enhance the quality of their WLB experience, so they can enjoy working and become more satisfied and committed to their organization.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is realized that this study only limited to companies which are located in Bekasi. As it known this is mostly manufacturing area. Hence, this findings cannot be generalized and transferred to other work environment. Further study in this topic and in other different areas will be very helpful to enhance the understanding of the complex and unique concept of work life balance (WLB) and to provide decision makers with valuable information in the practical knowledge of WLB in the purpose of companies' strategies and policies in the future.

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