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Work-family conflict among female head coaches in Iran

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Abstract

With the increased number of women participating in sport, it is anticipated that women have more opportunities to advance in sport careers such as coaching; however, women are faced with the conflict to keep up with their profession as coaches and their family duties as mothers, wives or singles. Female Division I and super league volleyball and basketball coaches participated in this qualitative, interview- based study through a selective method given that the number of women coaches is limited. Female head coaches exemplified to leave their careers because of the conflicts of work and family spill over.

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1. Introduction

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, there has been a great reform in the Civil Constitution. Under the new Islamic Republic Civil Law, all of the social activities should dye an Islamic colour (called Islamification). The society should be stripped of all the symbols of western subjugation. Thus, the legitimacy of women's sport was deeply questioned in four levels: a) the canonical honour of women participating in sport, b) the attribution of sport to westernization and thus its clash with the new national and religious morals, c) the non-ethical outfits of women participating in sport, and d) the blending of men with women. Sport was banned for women around the country. After a long range of socio-political movements by quite an ample number of female activists_ talking to the clergy with the proposition of the separation of sport venues for women and men_ some sparks of hope began to emerge. It took 4 years and the efforts of a group of Physical Education graduates and ex-athletes and referees that in 1982 the Deputy of Women's Sport Associations was founded and run solely by women in all three levels of management (top, middle and low). The Deputy contributed so much to the women's sport in ways that are basically expected of any sport organization worldwide, with the mission of education, development, competitions, and so on.

Since then, the rate of female participation in sports has increased to a great extent. There was now a generation of women who has grown up in the post revolution era and whose daughters were the secondary beneficiaries of the law. It was anticipated that women would now be faced with a realm of career opportunities as sport coaches, especially in the post-war era when the country came out of austerity. Yet it turned out to be a false prospect. And,

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of course, the problem is not localized. Studies by Acosta & Carpenter (2006) concerning the estimated increase in the percentage of women who continue their sport career as coaches in the US also proved questionable.

Such concerns are more capitalized in Islamic countries where family is prioritized in the general beliefs. The father and the husband is the head of the household. He is -by law- the sole provider for the family in return for obedience and respect from others in the family. Many younger families, imbued with revolutionary religious views or secular values, have not been able to reconcile these new ideas; hence, the percentage of dual earner married couples rose (Hamed, 2006; Goodarzi and Chegini & Haghi, 2010). Yet, this shift in occupational patterns, (the increase in dual earner couples) did not necessarily lead to the breakdown of traditional gender roles.

As most women and men take on new responsibilities and roles both at the work place and the house, research on the challenges of balancing work and family has flourished (Barling, 1990; Brotheridge & Lee, 2005; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Kelloway, Gottlieb, & Barham, 1999). Yet, in Islamic countries such as Iran, men still refuse to take on more responsibilities within the home, such as child rearing duties and household chores, contrary to the western societies in which men have begun to undertake such responsibilities more attentively (e.g., Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). Even amongst the younger educated generation, being the man of the house denotes the need to be served and it is considered degrading to involve in household duties. As Pleck (1977) also suggested, men have strong allegiance to work rather than family, and women, on the other hand, are still more likely to place a greater importance on their family roles. Therefore, it seems that women are more apt to suffer from work-family conflicts.

1.1. Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict is defined as a type of Interrole conflict wherein some work and family responsibilities are not fitting together concerning time and effort spent, which many in turn result in scarring each of the domains (Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Such interference which can be reciprocal, will sometimes cause stress and strain on the person attempting to function in multiple roles, as well as those around him or her (e.g., coworkers, spouse/partner, children). This Interrole conflict, or in other words, role theory, (Kahn et al., 1964; Kanter, 1977; Barnett & Gareis, 2006) predicts that the multiple roles that individuals fill as workers (e.g., employee, supervisor) and family members (e.g., child, parent, spouse or partner, sibling) are in conflict with each other because of the limited amount of time and resources individuals have to spend on each role. Therefore, the time and energy in one role necessitates time and energy away from the other roles.

Netemeyer, Mcmurrian and Boles (1996) describe work-family conflict as the discord that arises when the time devoted to or time spent fulfilling professional responsibilities interferes with or limits the amount of time available to perform family-related responsibilities, making it difficult to manage both. (Netemeyer, McMurrian, and Boles, 1996). Women feel work imposes more on their family life than men since they take on more household responsibilities than men. Women may have fewer resources available to them, thus limiting their ability to cope with work demands (Hobfoll, 1989). This interpretation would be consistent with research that has found that male coaches are less likely to suffer from this conflict than female coaches because they reportedly have help with household duties.

Previous research has indicated that the consequences of work-family conflict include psychological distress, poor health, decreased marital or job satisfaction, reduced job performance, and intent to leave one's profession (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Cutler & Jackson, 2002; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, & Beutell, 1989; Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003; Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986; Pastore, 1993; Wilson, 2003).

According to Dixon and Bruening (2007) sport environments are usually characterized with strenuous organizational culture of demanding of long hours, excessive travel, and "face time". Personal sacrifices in time and energy for the sake of the program and additionally, non-traditional work hours on nights and weekends contribute to work and life conflict (Bruening et al 2008). Most work-family conflict research has focused on full-time employment and has defined family as "two or more individuals occupying interdependent roles with the purpose of accomplishing shared goals" (Eby et al., 2005)..

1.2. Gender Stereotypes

Males and females are different due to the biological, reproductive differences and each possess socially accepted norms that conform to their gender (Coltrane & Collins, 2001). Gender roles are constructed differently and are experienced differently depending on the culture and economic status of individuals (Zinn & Dill, 1996). Genders carry with them expected positive and negative traits. For example, positive traits affiliated to women are kindness, consideration, and nurturing, while the negative traits could be known as sentimentality, fragility, and dependence. Positive traits associated with men are believed to be competitiveness, decisiveness, and assertiveness (Baron et al., 2006; Powell et al., 2002; Wilde & Diekmann, 2005; William, Satterwhite, & Best, 1999).

The stereotypical characteristics attributed to men and women in society influence the classification of various occupations as masculine or feminine, which tends to affect people's aspiration and inclination toward such jobs (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). For example, men, compared with women, are assumed to and tend to be more inclined to participate and excel in body building and professional sport coaching, while women, compared with men are more inclined toward personal training and coaching in fitness clubs. Scholars interested in the relationship between gender and career choices contend that men and women's preferences are a reflection of their knowledge about gender-related characteristics associated with the task (gender-role stereotypes) as well as their identification with masculine or feminine characteristics (gender identification). Gender stereotypes consist of shared beliefs about the characteristics and attributes associated with each sex.

Convictions and beliefs about the qualities that men and women possess and bring with themselves to the workplace determine the types of jobs that are regarded as appropriate for them. In consequence, the prerequisite requirements of some jobs would be defined by gender-related characteristics and these jobs would become known as "men's work or women's work" (Heilman, 1977). The gender association of jobs as masculine or feminine (e.g. associating engineering, surgery, and judiciary with masculinity and nursing and servicing with femininity) is referred to as gender-role stereotypes (Heilman, 1983) and is common in society (Miller & Budd, 1999).

In the athletic literature, head coaching is believed to be a "manly business" while athletic training, and sport psychology jobs and office work are seen as a "woman's work". Thus, occupations dominated by members of either sex are seen as predominantly masculine or feminine and success in these occupations is believed to require correspondingly masculine or feminine and success in these occupations is believed to require correspondingly stereotypical characteristics (Heilman, 1977). One of the common stereotypes that obstruct women's progress in coaching includes "women are not aggressive enough and not good at problem solving" (Brantner, 2006). Women are frequently stereotyped as "care takers" which include behaviours such as supporting and rewarding; on the other hand, men are often stereotyped as the ones who "take care" including behaviours such as delegating and influencing upward (Catalyst, 2005). Coaching positions are associated with "take charge" types of person, in which sense stereotyping women are less suited for the job. Women are also stereotyped as lacking problem-solving skills as men do (Catalyst, 2005). Viewing women as poor problem solvers will lead to assistants and athletes to lose faith in women's abilities in problem solving and competence and may be hesitant to follow instructions from a woman coach. For that matter, women have low interpersonal power (Catalyst, 2005) and it would be difficult for women coaches to enforce their expertise.

1.3. Three Bases for Conflict

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) categorized key antecedents of conflict between work and family domains into three types: time-based pressures, strain-based pressures, and behavioural incompatibilities. Time based pressures occur when one is physically present or mentally preoccupied with either the work or family domain, making it difficult to fulfil obligations in other roles, in the work domain, long work hours, schedule inflexibility, shift-work

requirements, and overtime or evening work have all been found to create conflict between work and family roles (e.g., Byron, 2005; Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994; Parasurman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996). In the family domain, household and child-care related responsibilities can create time-based conflict with work responsibilities (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). Strain-based pressures involve factors that relate to stress, strain, or tension. Work stress, work role overload, conflict with one's occupational role, work role ambiguity, and job exhaustion have been identified as possible strain-based pressures leading to WFC (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2005; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Leiter & Durup, 1996). Family related strain-based pressures include factors such as parental conflict and marital discord (Byron, 2005).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Female Division I and super league volleyball and basketball coaches (n=35) participated in this study. The women who participated in the study ranged age from 26 to 45 years (M=31.6). They all had head coaching experiences ranging from 2 to 10 years (M=6.46). The sampling method was a selective one since the number of women coaches is limited. With regard to their education, 18 of the coaches either earned a Master's degree or were in the program, one was PHD candidate, 15 of them had a Bachelor's degree and 1 only finished high school. The participants consisted of 18 married, 8 singles and 9 divorcees. Most of the individuals (n=22) were mothers of 2 children, 1 had 3 children, and 4 of the coaches had only one child. The average age of the children was 11.4 years, with the youngest being 5 years old.

2.2. Research Method

A qualitative approach was chosen which allow for in-depth and richly nuanced exploration of motives and experiences, best fit the research questions for this study. This study sought to provide answers to the question of what factors influence the work-family conflict, a phenomenon that has been described through quantitative data, without the thick explanations that come from focused qualitative study of a limited number of participants. This qualitative research is supposed to provide in-depth understandings of women coaches' perceptions as well as explanations for women's conflicts in work and family domains.

2.3. Data Collection

In-depth or long interview methodology was chosen to concern personal information including but not limited to participants lived experiences, and perspective. It is appropriate to use an in-depth interview method when the researcher is seeking to uncover information on a deeper level which would not be revealed in surveys, informal interviewing or focus groups (Johnson, 2002). The technique of face-to-face or telephone interviewing was selected based on the diverse geographic locations of participants and their schedules. Each subject consented to participate by replying to an introductory e-mail or through a phone call. Through the email or the phone call the participant were informed about the nature of the study, its purpose, interview procedure, and nature of the questions. The e-mail or the phone contact will be used as a proof of consent.

2.4. Data Analysis

Questions were derived from relevant literature and were all open-ended. Interview questions focused on the participants' experiences and views concerning the factors contributing to work interference with family. The answers were first tape recorded all interviews and then transcribed the recordings for accurate records. Next, the data was explored in detail by again reading all transcripts, and the developing a list of emergent themes and coding. Participants were asked to share personal experiences, motives, perceptions, and feelings—revealing things that these participants might not be able to explained in a questionnaire or survey. This study sought to provide answers to the question of why the demands of and amount of time spent at work interfere with home and family life.

3. Conclusion[†]

Most of the findings confirm to the previous literature on the work-family conflict. The results follow, organized around the themes and subthemes of the coding tree, as they arose from the research questions. Research Question focused on the individual, structural/organizational, and socio-cultural factors that impacted work-family conflict. It is not possible to restate the responses of all the participants, so only those that fell under the themes are presented here.

Individual Factors

Multitasking. It seems that even though the sexes would appear to splitting the drudgery nearly evenly inside and outside the house, women still have many more responsibilities. That's not showing up in the hours they work, though, because they're so likely to be doing two things at once. One of the mothers suggested that: *"Working mothers are doing two activities at once more than two-fifths of the time they are awake, while working fathers are multitasking more than a third of their waking hours."* Meanwhile, women were taking on tasks that were a lot more labor-intensive than what the men were doing, such as: housework, and childcare. However, they all seemed to value work and family to consent keeping one at the cost of the other. The women said they could not see their lives as being complete without both family and work: "I feel that I am a better Mom as a working Mom, and don't know if I could stay home all the time and be happy", one elaborated. One unmarried coach also said that *"the ability to handle so much gives me a sense of pride ad accomplishment"*. Such an attitude will definitely lead to more conflict and more feelings of stress and strain both at work and at home.

Home Invader Stress. All the women, unanimously, agreed that coaching especially at the level they did can be especially stressful, with many in the field having to make public appearances or decisions on very short notice with imperfect information. Three of the criteria used to measure stress seem particularly appropriate to this field: successful results, working in the public eye, and meeting the public. In addition, as traditional forms of coaching transition to the use of advanced electronic devices and analyzing software, those who want to remain employed need to embrace new technologies or find new careers. The participants contended that they should learn to keep stresses from one area of their lives from bleeding over into others. *"Most of us, though, are not so talented"*, one woman stated. Work stress and the inability to leave work problems at the office, where they belong, has a more detrimental impact than expected.

Mothering Time Lost. Although the self-identified driven women felt the strain of striving to be successful at everything they did, tended to feel "more stress about not spending enough time raising their children". Since men and women cannot share facility times in Iran, the training area should be totally evicted of male presence when females are using the facility. And the male dominant nature of the sport compels that male athletes have access to the facilities at the most productive hours of the day. Therefore, most training hours fall between 1 to 5 pm, at the exact time that the children come back home from school. And because day care is non existence in Iran (due to the cultural belief that mothers should stay home to take care of the children), female coaches are obligated to take the children to training sessions. *"The guilt is even harsher when it coincides with the most demanding part of the competitive season and the time and travel demands too much of a head coach"*, women explained.

Relationship with Spouses. Every participant who responded ($n = 19$) agreed that the one area that suffered most in the effort to balance work and family was their relationship with their spouse or partner. It only takes one partner's work stress to hurt a marriage. If one partner was experiencing significant work stress, it often affected both partner's marital satisfaction. A stressed coach often shares work frustrations with their spouse or partner, and the partner feels desperate to fix it. But that is unrealistic, and the feelings of helplessness can build more stress.

[†] The findings concerning families with children do not apply to single coaches or coaches with no children.

Additionally, the stressed and distracted coach may neglect family responsibilities and the ongoing issue also can affect marital satisfaction. Divorced coaches felt that they *“failed in their marriages due to the their inability to compartmentalize and being occupied with the thoughts of work at all times.”* And those still married asserted that *“they might lose their family status as married women if they are not careful enough about the interference.”*

Burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when one feels overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress continues, the person begins to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place. While some professions are dependent on physical labor, others are dependent on emotional labor (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988). Participants believed that *“coaching is a profession high in both physical and emotional labour;... is characterized by high levels of emotional communication and high degrees of physical as well as mental exertion”*. An increase in physical and emotional burnout may lead to an increase in work-family conflict, which in turn may contribute to a further increase in both of the above. Hence, the ability to recover from workload demands may decrease over time.

Organizational Factors

Sponsors. There is still a tendency in Iran that belittles women's sport. Limitations imposed on the media coverage of women engaging in the sport without covers, lack of television broadcasting of women's competitions from anywhere in the world, the scarcity of revenue making from women's competitions, etc. are among the factors that makes it difficult for women's teams to find sponsors. Few coaches (n=17) confirmed: *“most seasons we cannot find a sponsor to support the team. However, the love for the game and players and our self-motivations hinder us to dissolve the team. So we pay for all the uniforms and travel expenses ourselves upon agreement. Coaches share the largest sum.”* The load that this situation imposes on the coaches' families is overwhelming which *“leads to confrontation in home, that if this is a career, it is supposed to bring home added revenue yet the family's income is thus far lost because of the team”*, women described. This is one of the biggest contributors to the work-family conflict.

Work and travel times. For most of these coaches that participated the study (n= 27) club coaching was the second part time job. They were employed by different organizations for which they had to have enough face-time at the organization to stay employed. In addition, coaches are expected to be working non-traditional hours (i.e. weekends, nights, and even holidays). Coaching is also a year round job, with off-season training, recruiting and meetings, and planning for the next season. *“Even if you are not actually working in the field, your mind is preoccupied all the time”* they asserted. Coaches of both disciplines confirmed: *“the competitions are held on weekends, either weekly or every other week, and they usually last 6-8 months, which mainly involve extensive travelling. It means a lot of leisure and family time away from the family. Our children feel resentment toward own job because they feel that I am providing others' children with fun activities and depriving our own of what they deserve”*. Single coaches Such work characteristics put coaches in a context where work-family conflict is conspicuous (also approved by Dixon and Breuning, 2005).

Women's Sport as Redundant. Almost all participants that women's sport is perceived as redundant, not worthy of investing in. It was like this until years 2010-2012 that female athletes started to win positions in Asian and World competitions and obtaining Olympics standards that this view **is starting** to change. For that matter, coaches felt degraded whenever they had to refer to the administrative office. One coach said: *“sponsoring women's sport is like a charity work for the clubs; since men are not allowed inside the venue to observe our training and games, they imagine that we are a group of women that gathered together to fill their free time and stay active. Picturing women coaches and players as professionals in sport industry is far beyond their imagination”*. Women have to cope with such negative attitudes which usually convert into a hidden rage, and when they go home they release their anger at the nearest man available – man of the house or the fathers (for singles).

Financial Support. A comparison of the coaches' salaries by gender reveals that women coaches are being consistently paid way less than the essence of the job demands. Women disappointedly asserted that: *“The disparity between salaries of men and women exists not only because of professional regulations, but also because it is a cultural norm”*. But head coaches of women's teams — who are predominantly female — are paid less than 50 cents to every male team's head coach's dollar. It is difficult for women to fight for equality when society looks down on strong women, one said. *“I just think that the way society looks at women, they expect us to be so passive,”* she said.

"And when women finally speak up for their rights, society looks down upon them". This issue also contributes to family disputes that the money earned is not worth all the time and energy spent working for it.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Male Dominancy. Sport is a male dominated profession, even more so in Islamic countries. To be visible and appreciated, women have to prove their worthiness, which means working harder and more obviously than their counterparts. Male-dominated jobs, like coaching, often assume that the person employed has a significant external support system, resulting in few internal support structures (Dodds, 2003; Goodstein, 1995; Inglis et al., 2000; McKay et al., 2000; Theberge, 1992). This, coupled with women usually having greater responsibility for child

care, can unduly burden women who attempt to manage career and family in these settings. The fact that single coaches are not loaded with household responsibilities does not exclude them of suffering from this organizational culture. These coaches believed that *"even if you prove yourself to be a knowledgeable and worthy coach, you need to work twice as hard for the team to succeed for the fear that failure in any sense would be accompanied with the verbal and literate threat of losing the support of the sponsors for the next year."*

Gender Roles. Traditional social definitions of gender have emotional and psychological impacts. In many Islamic societies, there is a division of roles creating a woman's space in the private sphere of the home and a man's in the public sphere. In Islam, a woman's primary responsibility is usually interpreted as fulfilling her role as a wife and mother, whereas a man's role is to work and be able to financially support his wife and family. The societal belief is that for women family should be the number one priority, and her career should come in second. Perceptions, true or false, are instrumental in guiding how we are treated and how we treat others. One woman stated: *"Women's physical ability to provide effective physical support for their athletes is questioned. Women are perceived as having imputed lack of physical and mental strength necessary for coaching - in other words-masculine attributes"*. There is yet another problem. If women do adopt these attributes, they would be characterized as 'queer', mostly experienced mostly by unmarried coaches. Social norms not only exert pressure on women to choose work or family but also impart a negative social connotation in choosing work over family.

Working women typically experience role conflicts as they battle the time and socio-cultural expectations of filling both worker and mother roles (Dixon, 2006). Most of the research on work- family conflict was conducted in western cultures with less restrictive social involvement for women. It was the purpose of this study to find out whether such conflict exists in an Islamic society with more limitative societal rules; and what the contributors to the problem are. Job pressure/stress, work hours/schedule, and longer hours and personality types, are the individual-level variables that have been found in the analysis. The feelings of guilt for not being able to fulfil their responsibilities as mothers and spouses are associated with higher work-family conflict.

The organizational factors leading to work-family conflict is largely concerned with examinations of workplace characteristics and how they interact with individual behaviour. The study revealed that work-family conflict may also result from organizational characteristics lower organizational and financial support, degrading women's sport professionalism, limited sponsorship are contributors to high work-family conflict.

For work and family, social norms related to gender, particularly on the definitions of masculine and feminine, have had a critical impact on perceptions of the society towards women workers. The Iranian society is largely predicated on traditional gender roles of the male as worker/breadwinner and the female as domestic caretaker. These findings suggest that women coaches do not compartmentalize their experiences of work and family into separate domains. Rather, work and family dynamically overlap and outcomes in one domain are influenced by experiences in the other domain. Women may be particularly likely to feel conflicted over their numerous responsibilities.

Female coaches may need to be attuned to ways in which they feel their professional duties are intruding on their family lives and male coaches may need to be particularly mindful of carrying the stress of their work home with them.

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