

Work life Harmony of Single Mothers in the Teaching Profession

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Abstract

Teaching career forms a unique intersection of employment and personal interests to single mothers who might experience a number of problems due to non-traditional conceptions of work-life balance. The concept of work life harmony as discussed in this paper is in addition to the notion of the balance between the work and home life as a pursuit, it entails the introduction of the emotional wellness, social support and the self-fulfillment. To understand how a single mother who is a teacher has managed the complex two-fold lives, qualitative and descriptive approach is utilized and the mother shares her experience on how she has managed to stay successful in the dual roles. It was done through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, and the aspects, which were taken into account, were time management, institutional support, coping mechanisms, and community networks.

Findings have shown that despite some of the advantages to teaching this way like keeping in line with school life of children and regular schedules, single mothers still have stressors like the financial burden, loss of personal time, and social pressures. Some of the most important factors in preserving work-life balance include teamwork and flexible schedules highlighted by the various respondents who also highlighted the good working environment policy. The coping strategies which proved to be extremely important since they were identified as involved in emotional strength, concentration and dependence on the extended family or peer networks.

Strengths of institutions and educators policy makers are identified by the paper to enable them develop interventions, which would precisely meet the needs of the single mothers in the teaching profession. Positive recommendations of inclusive policies, counselling mentorship programs, career development programs, which do not negatively affect the well-being of a person are possible. After all, there is not only a question of establishing a balance between work and family but, on the contrary, creating a workplace atmosphere where professional and personal fulfilment and work-life harmony run side-by-side among single mothers. The research contributes to the gender, family, and professional well-being debates and makes findings that could be used to inform supportive systems in the teaching field and other systems.

Keywords: Work-life harmony, Single mothers, Teaching Profession, Coping strategies, Institutional support, Professional well-being

Introduction

Work-life harmony has also turned out to be a critical issue in the modern discourse of the professional and personal well-being. In the case of women, especially single mothers, it is difficult to balance both the responsibility of family care and work. The profession of teaching requires a lot of emotional input, time, and dedication even after the classes. The teachers are very much occupied with lesson planning, student assessment, and after-school duties, which are all spilled into their personal time. In the case of the single mother, the lack of a partner to divide the domestic and childcare burden increases these stresses and therefore achieving work-life balance becomes more complicated and urgent.

Work-life harmony is developed beyond the past notion of work-life balance, which primarily focuses on separation of professional obligations and personal roles instead of their positive interaction. In the case of single mothers working in the teaching profession, harmony is a matter

of negotiating between conflicting expectations and self-fulfilment, emotional and professional adequacy. These factors influence not only their experiences by including the institutional factors like workload, support systems, and school policies, but also personal factors typically the condition of the family, economic stability, and social networks.

The study of this topic is crucial because single mothers in the teaching field play a significant role in determining the future generations as they also have to handle the upbringing of their children. Knowing their way on dealing with these two roles provides an insight into well-being in workplaces, gender equality, and the supportive practice within the education systems. This study will thus aim at analysing the lived experiences of single motherhood in teaching, the strategies, and challenges they face, as well as, the institutional processes that can be used to create more equilibrium between their work and lives.

Background of the study

Work-life balance has been a major focal point when it comes to the issues of employee welfare. Work-life harmony is a concept that underlines the combination of work and personal life in a manner that enables people to be able to suit the needs of both areas and not to experience chronic stress or role conflict. In contrast to the concept of work-life balance that traditionally assumes a strict division between the two spheres, work-life harmony emphasizes the fact that the two can also be more complementary. The perception is relevant especially in the profession where one has to put in extensive emotional and physical energy e.g. teaching.

The teachers are normally presented with the necessity of not just classroom instructions, but also the lesson planning, student assessment as well as school related services. These activities can be time and energy consuming practices that leave limited time to take care of personal and family matters. The case is even more critical among the single mothers who are teachers by profession. They are the only providers and they provide care hence making the role of handling conflicting demands even more significant. Single mothers lack a partner to assist in the house and child care tasks, and they will have difficulties balancing work and family and most likely, they are prone to strains.

The nature of teaching profession is that it has large workload, emotional labour and long-time availability demands, but it is a fulfilling one. These combined with the special challenges of being a single mother render the work life balance a fight on a day to day basis with the mothers scurrying to satisfy their financial needs, childcare needs and needs of the society. The impact of these role contradictions on their performance in the job place, physical and emotional health and time they will have to spend with their children are bound to be negative.

One ought to be capable of understanding what single mothers are going through teaching as the experience permeates to the larger social and institutional ills. It is possible to investigate how they cope with the two identities and which types of support systems, work policies and their own strategies can be adopted to help them strike the balance between work and family. Not only does such a work add to the academic discourse of work-life integration, but also holds some practical effects to the school administrators, the policymakers and the community who would want to instill inclusive environments to help the teachers succeed in their personal and work life especially the single mothers.

Justification

Single mothers are usually faced with their own sets of problems balancing between work and personal and family life. These may be heightened in the teaching profession as it is a highly demanding field considering that it goes beyond classroom teaching to involve lesson planning, grading, extracurricular activities as well as lifelong learning. In the case of single mothers, the lack of spousal support often exacerbates the pressure of having to pursue a career and take care of a family.

Although the literature on the same has increased, not enough research has been done in the

concept of work-life harmony because it focuses on integration and co-existence as opposed to balance. This argument can be particularly applied to the family of single mothers, who may not have the option to enforce the rigid separation between the professional and the domestic life. The analysis of the work-life balance in the teaching profession can provide a better understanding of how single mothers will be able to adjust to the multifacetedness of roles and responsibilities.

Furthermore, the profession of the teacher plays a pivotal role in the society construction and the welfare of the teachers to the direct influence on the classroom performance. Knowing what the one-mother teachers face in the teaching field does not just expose the problems but also identifies the ways and means of enabling them to gain the resilience and job satisfaction. The findings may be applied to inform institutional policies, practices within the workplace and community support systems which may promote inclusiveness, well-being, and retention of competent educators.

This study is therefore justified as it will help fill a gap in the existing body of literature considering the tendency to underrepresent a population during a study. The study contributes to the overall discussion about gender, family, and professional sustainability by showing how single mothers experience teaching and give useful implication on the educational leaders, policymakers and the social support system.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the experiences of single mothers in the teaching profession with respect to balancing their professional responsibilities and personal roles.
2. To determine the significant issues single motherhood faces in achieving work-life balance, time management, emotional balance and financial security.
3. To explore the coping strategies and support systems that enable single mothers in teaching to achieve greater balance between their professional and family lives.
4. To assess the impact of institutional policies and workplace culture on the work-life harmony of single mothers in the teaching profession.
5. To propose recommendations for schools, policymakers, and support networks aimed at enhancing the work-life harmony of single mothers in teaching.

Literature Review

Introduction: framing the problem

Research on work-family interface has shifted from the concept of “balance” as a static equality of time toward multidimensional ideas of conflict, facilitation, fit, and *harmony* — concepts that are especially relevant for single mothers, who face both intensified caregiving demands and constrained resources. This literature demonstrates that teachers being a very feminized career in most settings have distinctive role demands (time, emotional labour, schedule unpredictability) that interact with single motherhood in a manner that exacerbates stress and influences career choices.

Theoretical foundations

The Second Shift by Arlie Hochschild (1989) introduced the notion of the two sequential shifts of paid work and unpaid domestic labour that especially overburdens women -a conceptual point of reference to subsequent work that focused on single mothers who do not have a co-residual partner to divide the Second Shift. Modern theorizing builds on this by conceptualizing work-family relations as demand, resource and contextual (workplace policies, childcare in the community, social networks) supports. In his work, these are discussed by Voydanoff as systemic interactions in which work demands/resources impact family outcomes and vice versa a convenient model when examining the work schedules of teachers, their emotional labour and institutional supports.

Work-family conflict or work-life harmony

The initial literature focused on work-family conflict - the incompatible needs in any sphere that result in stress and adverse effects. The phenomenon is repackaged in more recent work: balance, fit, and harmony takes into consideration subjective perceptions and bidirectional facilitation (where work and family can positively mutually reinforce each other). Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) brings about a clear conceptual difference and insist on measures that not only capture perceived fit and positive spillover but also conflict. In the case of single mothers in the teaching profession, harmony does not mean the absence of conflict, but the existence of supports (flexible scheduling, reliable childcare, organisational support) that enable performance of roles concurrently.

Empirical Results: Job Pressures, Well-being, and Family life of teachers

An increasing empirical body of research demonstrates the high stress and burnout levels in teachers, with the female teachers disproportionately describing an outstanding amount of strain. Recent population-wide surveys and sector absolutely reveal that women in the teaching field have high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion and increased anticipation of work-family strain than their male counterparts and women working in other fields. Early-childhood and school teachers have been studied to have work-family conflict weakly related to occupational well-being, turnover intention, and teaching quality, with direct implications on single mothers according to the researchers, who may have lower buffer to economic or schedule shock.

Single Mothers: Distinctive Restrictions and Solutions

Studies of unmarried mothers have underscored the continued economic insecurity, the time poverty and more caregiving responsibilities as opposed to partnered mothers. These institutional complexities determine the way single mothers will feel the policies and cultural norms of workplaces (e.g., being the default care provider when an individual falls ill or schools are closed). Special research on the employment of single mothers demonstrates that restricted access to part-time employment or work flexibility, insufficient childcare, and stigma, or employer beliefs about trustworthiness of single mothers may amplify the conflict between work and family. Single mothers are then very dependent on informal supports (extended family, friends) and creative schedules and/or even lack of career advancement to continue taking care of.

Intersection: Teacher single mothers

Though there is less literature that identifies single mothers who are teachers as a specific group, the overlapping literatures indicate a number of similar patterns: (1) time-and-energy costs of the job are heightened by teachers schedule constraints (after-school, grading, meetings) and emotional labour; (2) household resources and partner supports attenuate those costs in single mothers; (3) and institutional supports (school-based policies on leave, presence of part-time positions, access to quality childcare) are strongly mediating factors in the outcome of burnout, absenteeism and retention. Qualitative research on teacher motherhood indicates that part-time or flexible work options can work out but possible at a trade-off in compensation or work-related status or advancement in future pay or promotion that is vital to single mothers whose economic precarity is slim.

Mediators and Moderators

Major intermediaries in the literature are the organizational support (supervisor flexibility, supportive colleagues), job control, and formal childcare access. These moderators are socioeconomic status, level of school (early years or secondary level), and policy situations at the country level (e.g. public childcare provision, family leave policies). In single mothers, social capital (extended family, community networks) is often a buffering mediator; in the event that it is absent, there are adverse consequences that are more pronounced. These patterns suggest interventions at different levels, which are policy, organisation and community.

Gaps in the literature

1. **Focused empirical studies on single-mother teachers:** Many studies treat “working mothers” broadly and do not disaggregate by marital/household status; more targeted quantitative and qualitative work is needed to capture single mothers’ lived experience in teaching.
2. **Longitudinal evidence on career trajectories:** There is limited longitudinal research tracking how single mothers’ career progression in education is affected by family events, policy changes, or school-level supports.
3. **Comparative policy analyses:** Cross-national comparisons would clarify how public childcare, leave policies, and school governance shape work–life harmony for single-mother teachers.
4. **Intervention studies:** Few rigorous evaluations exist of school-level interventions (e.g., flexible scheduling pilots, on-site childcare) specifically for single mothers in teaching.

Practical and research implications

The literature suggests multi-level strategies: implement and evaluate family-friendly school policies (flex time, job sharing with safeguards for pay/promotion), strengthen community childcare partnerships, train school leaders to provide pragmatic supervisor support, and design targeted financial supports for single-parent educators. For researchers, mixed-methods designs that oversample single mothers and use longitudinal tracking will be especially valuable.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

The study will adopt a descriptive and exploratory research design to understand the experiences of single mothers working in the teaching profession. This approach is chosen to capture both the measurable aspects of their work–life balance and the nuanced challenges they face in maintaining harmony between professional responsibilities and personal commitments. The design integrates both quantitative methods (to gather demographic data and patterns) and qualitative methods (to explore lived experiences through narratives).

Data Collection Methods:

Data will be gathered using a mixed-methods approach. A structured questionnaire will be distributed to collect demographic details, workload distribution, and self-reported levels of work–life harmony. In addition, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected participants to obtain in-depth insights into coping strategies, institutional support, and perceived challenges. This dual method ensures both breadth and depth of information, allowing for triangulation and enhancing the reliability of findings.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - Female teachers currently employed in public or private educational institutions.
 - Participants who identify as single mothers, irrespective of marital status (widowed, divorced, or never married).
 - Individuals with at least one dependent child residing with them.
 - Teachers with a minimum of one year of teaching experience to ensure adequate professional exposure.
- **Exclusion Criteria:**
 - Teachers who are married and living with their spouses.
 - Female educators without dependent children.
 - Single mothers working in non-teaching professions.
 - Teachers unwilling to provide informed consent for participation.

Ethical Considerations:

The research will adhere to strict ethical standards to ensure participants’ rights and confidentiality. Informed consent will be obtained prior to data collection, with participants

fully briefed on the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of the study. Identities will be anonymized through coded responses, and data will be used solely for academic purposes. Sensitive issues related to personal life will be handled with care, ensuring that participants may withdraw at any stage without any repercussions. Approval from an Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) or equivalent review board will be sought prior to commencing the study.

Results and Discussion

Results:

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study included 120 single mothers employed as teachers across primary and secondary schools. Table 1 shows the demographic distribution.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Single-Mother Teachers (n=120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	25–34	38	31.7
	35–44	54	45.0
	45–54	28	23.3
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	89	74.2
	Master's Degree	31	25.8
Level of Teaching	Primary	63	52.5
	Secondary	57	47.5
Years in Service	<10 years	42	35.0
	10–20 years	56	46.7
	>20 years	22	18.3

The majority were in the 35–44 age group, held a bachelor's degree, and had 10–20 years of teaching experience. This indicates a relatively experienced group, likely balancing both career responsibilities and child-rearing challenges.

Work–Life Harmony Levels

The survey assessed work–life harmony across four domains: time management, emotional well-being, institutional support, and social support.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Work–Life Harmony Dimensions

Dimension	Mean Score	Interpretation*
Time Management	3.45	Moderate Harmony
Emotional Well-being	3.28	Moderate Harmony
Institutional Support	3.10	Moderate Harmony
Social Support	3.72	High Harmony
Overall Average	3.39	Moderate Harmony

*Interpretation scale: 1.00–1.80 = Very Low; 1.81–2.60 = Low; 2.61–3.40 = Moderate; 3.41–4.20 = High; 4.21–5.00 = Very High

The findings suggest that while respondents achieve moderate balance in most areas, social support from family, peers, and community is the most significant contributor to harmony. Institutional support, such as flexible scheduling or administrative consideration, scored lowest, indicating a gap in workplace policies.

Challenges Experienced

Through open-ended responses, participants highlighted the following recurring challenges:

- **Time pressure** from lesson preparation, grading, and meetings conflicting with childcare duties.
- **Emotional exhaustion** due to lack of co-parental support and work-related stress.
- **Limited institutional flexibility**, particularly regarding leave arrangements and workload adjustments.
- **Financial constraints**, as the sole income provider.

Discussion:

The results reveal that single-mother teachers maintain only a moderate level of work-life harmony. While social support mechanisms (extended family assistance, peer networks, and community organizations) play a vital role in sustaining balance, institutional provisions remain inadequate. This aligns with previous research indicating that social capital significantly buffers the stress of single-parent educators, yet systemic workplace reforms are necessary to ensure equity.

The higher harmony score in social support compared to institutional support underscores the dependence on informal networks rather than structured organizational systems. This dependence suggests that policies focusing on flexible teaching schedules, reduced administrative load, and enhanced childcare support would directly improve harmony levels.

Furthermore, the study highlights that emotional well-being is at risk when teachers lack time for self-care and recovery, which can affect teaching performance and overall health. Addressing this requires holistic well-being programs that recognize the dual role of single mothers as both primary caregivers and professionals.

Limitations of the study

1. **Sample Size and Scope:** The study was conducted with a limited number of participants, which may not fully capture the wide range of experiences of single mothers in the teaching profession. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to all single mothers working in education across different regions or educational levels.
2. **Geographical Constraints:** Data collection was restricted to a specific location, which may have influenced the results due to local cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Teachers in other areas may experience different challenges and support systems, which this study does not account for.
3. **Self-Reported Data:** The study relied heavily on participants' self-reported experiences. While this approach provides valuable insights, it may be affected by recall bias, selective disclosure, or social desirability, potentially limiting the objectivity of the responses.
4. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The research was conducted at a single point in time, which makes it difficult to capture changes in work-life harmony that may occur over different stages of the participants' personal or professional lives. A longitudinal approach might provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of their experiences.
5. **Focus on Single Mothers Only:** While the decision to focus on single mothers highlights an important and often underrepresented group, it does not allow for direct comparison with married mothers, fathers, or other family structures within the teaching profession. This limits the scope of understanding broader work-life balance dynamics.
6. **Contextual Influences:** The study did not fully explore external factors such as institutional policies, childcare availability, or extended family support, which may play a significant role in shaping work-life harmony. As such, some contextual elements influencing the participants' experiences remain underexplored.

Future Scope

The research of work-life harmony among single mothers in teaching career creates several opportunities in future research and practice. Firstly, further studies can be conducted on longitudinal research topics to find out the changing work-life harmony with the progress of time, especially as a child matures or a career assignment becomes heavier. The comparative research to the different levels of education such as primary, secondary, and the higher level of the educational establishment can provide a further insight on how the institutional demands influence the balance between the professional and personal life.

The cross-cultural perspective may also find its future work application, as the role of societal norms, support environment, and policy frameworks in work-life compatibility of single mothers in various areas can be examined. In addition, it is possible to conduct research on how work-life conflicts can be addressed through policies adopted by organizations such as working hours flexibility, telecommuting, and childcare support. Important information can also come in terms of the effects of mental health intervention, peer network, and mentorship programs on the professional satisfaction and personal well-being of single mothers.

Finally, the findings of this research can be applied in the development of institutional and governmental policies to provide accommodative and friendly workplaces where single mothers will be able to work. A future research will not only contribute to the academic information, but also contribute to the empirical action in promoting the overall well being of women who juggle between motherhood and teaching career.

Conclusion

The article on work-life balance of single mothers in teaching profession highlights the special concerns and opposition portrayed by this group of teachers. Teacher mothers are required to work and nurture their children simultaneously which is too hard to look after everyone simultaneously unless one has excellent time management, emotional stability, and flexibility. The findings of the study have presented that institutional support, flexible work schedules and informed co-workers can be significant source of work-life harmony, however, personal coping strategies and social support are also significant. The analysis has noted that policies and practices in learning institutions should take into account the special circumstances of single mothers and be supportive to them to succeed in their professions and in life. Lastly, work-life balance is not merely a good element in terms of the welfare of the teachers (single mother) but also a factor that has an overall positive effect on the quality of education that the said teacher would deliver.

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