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A relational understanding of work-life balance of Muslim migrant women in the West: Challenges and opportunities.

Abstract

With an increasing intensification of work and blurring of roles and boundaries between work and family, the study of work-life balance (WLB) is gaining increasing attention. For minority groups such as Muslim migrant women working in a Western context, despite the vast body of literature on this topic, it is unclear how WLB issues are actually enacted for such minority groupings. Further, since most studies of WLB have been undertaken at a singular level of analysis, this paper contributes to the WLB literature by providing a multi-level relational understanding of WLB issues for Muslim migrant women working in a Western context. Theoretical propositions and analysis developed in this paper provides a multi-level and relational understanding. Implications for managers tasked with managing WLB issues for Muslim migrant women in Western contexts are also discussed.

Introduction

This paper concerns work life balance of Muslim migrant women in the west. Despite a great deal of attention to this topic in the west, there is scarce literature available on theorizing work life balance in the context of Muslim migrant women and its possible implications for gender equality (or lack thereof) in the workplace. We identify a gap in the area of work life balance literature and Muslim migrant women, which we address by developing testable future research propositions. With an increase in the blurring of boundaries between family- and work-life domains, the concept of work-life balance (WLB) as a novel management approach for managing issues of work intensification and resolving work/family conflicts has gained significant legitimacy and momentum in the field of human resource management (HRM) (Green 2001; Greenblatt 2002; Guest, 2002; Sturges and Guest 2004; Beauregard and Henry 2009). Although there are numerous definitions of what we mean by the concept of WLB, we find Guest's (2002) definition inclusive. Guest, following a review of WLB defines WLB as the ability to allow "sufficient time to meet commitments at both work and home" (p.263). Even though there is a widespread acknowledgement that the concept of WLB is

shaped by changes in a nation's social, economic and institutional environments, most conceptualisations of WLB have emerged as standardised approaches from Anglo-Saxon and developed nations (CIPD 1999; Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Fleetwood et al. 2002; Gregory and Milner 2009; ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe 2010; Tomilson 2007). A major gap that has been identified in the literature on WLB which requires focusing not just on the individual, but also managerial and societal levels, to uncover WLB issues of the understudied groups which include ethnic and religious minorities in Western contexts (Casper et al. 2007; Eby et al. 2005; Fleetwood 2007 b; Kamenou 2008; Syed and Pio 2010). Others (Dykes and James 2009) describe the state of Muslim, migrant women as one of 'triple' paralyses. In line with such calls, this paper focuses on understanding challenges and opportunities that Muslim migrant women face in Western countries. We define Muslim migrant women (MMW) as women migrants of Muslim faith pursuing a career or profession in a Western host country. Based on a literature review, we envisage that Muslim migrant women would face additional challenges such as strong patriarchal cultural, economic, familial and work-life balance pressures as well as face ethnic discrimination at work in Western nations (Ali 2013. Akhtar 2014, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2005; Kabir and Evans 2002; Northcote et al. 2006, Scott and Franzmann 2007). We contribute to the literature on WLB by developing four propositions that capture WLB trends of Muslim migrant women. To this end, we focus on WLB issues of MMW in Western workplaces, and cross-cultural management issues facing MMW.

With an increasing diversity in family and work life roles, for example, presence of nuclear, joint and blended families, double-income couples, families with age-care responsibilities and solo parents and so on, there is a need to understand how these changes impact on employees' WLB needs in general (see for e.g. Parsuraman and Greenhaus 2003; Greenhaus et al. 2003), and for the purposes of this paper, for Muslim women working in the

West. Further, as a result of increased workforce participation by women and a move towards professionalism in the workforce, the number of Muslim women attaining higher education qualifications from Western nations has also increased, thus creating better job opportunities for them that will enable them to more effectively balance their family and work life commitments (see arguments made by Ahmad 2001; Greenhaus and Powell 2006).

To this end, the overarching aim of this paper is to how Muslim migrant women are affected by multiple influences at various levels such as socio-cultural contextual, diasporas' networks, organisational and individual/agent level pressures. Thus, we aim to achieve the following two objectives:

- (a) To undertake an integrated review of the literature, and by identifying the gaps in the literature present a multilevel understanding of how migrant Muslim women experience and manage WLB issues in Western settings.
- (b) To explore the nature and extent of WLB opportunities and challenges at multiple levels as presented by such environments and make sense of how context shapes the world views of WLB of Muslim migrant women.

In order to achieve the above objectives, this paper contributes in the following ways: First by addressing the above identified gaps, which have also been identified as critical in the Special Issue's call (see last bullet point, which calls for investigating work-life balance issues and the tensions between East and West worldviews) (Syed and Pio 2014). Second, the paper contributes by adopting a relational approach (Özbilgin 2006; Syed 2008a; Al Ariss and Syed 2011), which entails researchers to take into account the relation (thus the name relational) between various levels, micro-individual, meso-organizational, and macro-societal, in shaping our understanding of how migrant Muslim women deal with the tensions of conflicting worldviews in the context of WLB (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe 2014). We do

this by developing multilevel propositions for Muslim migrant women and how they interact with the influences of a socio-cultural contextual, network, organisational and agentic level. The individual level comprises the subjective experience of the individuals (e.g., the perceptions of migrant Muslim women about how their WLB issues). The organizational level questions the intermediary influence of the management of organizations (e.g. HR and diversity policies and practices) on WLB of Muslim women living in the West. Finally, the macro-contextual level refers to a country's institutional context with its cultural values, legislation, and politics of migration that frame WLB of Muslim migrant women. Such a relational approach helps offering a more granulated and contextual understanding of the phenomenon in question. .

Our paper is organised as follows. First, we review the important topic of work-life balance (WLB), and identify a gap in the context of MMW. This allows or inhibits us to portray a balance for MMW in the two commonly understood domains of family and work. Second, we provide a review of the important topic of MMW and the related work challenges and opportunities they face in a Western context. More specifically, we look at gender, values, family, religious and cultural pressures. A detailed and critical review of literature suggests that there is a gap when it comes to MMW and WLB. Overall, based on the above review and critique, we present the multi-level interactions through our relational framework, thus showing the intersecting areas that mitigate at different inter-sectional points.

A critical review of Work-life balance literature: The Western context

The concept of WLB has been in existence for a little over three decades, yet there are numerous calls for reconceptualising and clarifying the purpose and outcomes this approach seeks to achieve (CIPD 1999; Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Fleetwood et al., 2002; Gregory and Milner 2009; ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe 2010; Tomilson 2007). Fleetwood

(2002) offers a critique about the narrow discourses that dominate WLB literature. Even though one of the drivers for WLB is to manage childcare responsibilities by women, WLB practices often involve men and the debates move from parenting to care by men versus women, wherein childcare is still perceived to be a woman's responsibility (Fleetwood 2002). Below we offer a theoretical discussion of this topic and highlight some of the major knowledge gaps. A wide body of literature focuses on the performative aspects of WLB (see for example a review by Beauregard and Henry 2009) often highlighting the need for a business case for WLB to achieve a range of individual and organisational outcomes that ultimately have a positive impact of organisational performance. In developing his conceptualisation of WLB, Guest (2002) suggested that broadly there are two key factors at play here: work/organisational and home/family level factors. Depending on the intensity of work and home culture, the extent to which there is a need for achieving a 'balance' between these two domains will vary as will the outcomes of WLB.

Although there are numerous models, there are six commonly cited approaches of WLB (see for example, O'Driscoll 1996; Zedeck and Mosier 1990), some of which are relevant to the study of Muslim migrant women in the West. For example, one of the earliest conceptualisations focuses on a segmentational approach, wherein work and family as seen as two different domains and that these should be kept distinctive. Such a conceptualisation is not exclusive to the West or in fact other parts of the World, however, the intensity of such boundaries are more profound and in often cases impenetrable for MMW. Similarly, the spill over theory (Staines 1980), which argues that there are expected positive and negative spill overs from one domain to another as such these need to be understood and managed. In the context of MMW, often the institutional, national and cultural pressures facing MMW preclude them from fully benefiting from the positive spill overs of WLB. In most such cases,

owing to the cultural pressures facing MMW, the negative spill overs are exacerbated. The compensation model (Staines 1980) suggests that what may be lacking in one domain can be compensated for in the other. It is unlikely, in the context of MMW that they can choose one domain over the other due to high familial expectations they face culturally. The instrumental model suggests that activities in one domain have an instrumental impact on the other. This stands true for MMW, in a sense that leaning towards one domain relative to the other will adversely affect their WLB. Conflict-based models highlight that the difficulties presented in one domain leads to conflict in the other. For example, the most common forms of conflict described in the literature are: family-work-conflict (FWC) and work-family-conflict (WFC)). Although the first four models are useful, they are at the very best descriptive. Conflict model captures the key elements of the above models as well as introduces the natural occurrence and consequences of conflict in WLB approaches. As such, conflict models offer some promise as they help identify and analyse various antecedents in the two WLB domains. Furthermore, it is important to note that WFC is negatively correlated to the performative outcomes of job and life satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki 1999). In the case of MMW, conflict takes the centre stage in their WLB, due to embedded, entwined and complex cultural and religious reasons. For example, the importance of a woman's role as a mother, wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law. The above is further developed through Clark's conceptualisation below.

In the context of migrant Muslim women, the conceptualisation by Clark (2000), which argues that family and work domains are both physically and temporally separated is relevant here. Clark proposed a new theoretical approach to understanding WLB, wherein he uses a 'border theory' of work family balance. This theory can help analyse the boundaries between work and personal life. Once we can understand these boundaries and domains, it is easier to

identify the extent to which individuals can help control the domains of each border and understand how it has an impact on the other domain. Clark (2000) developed several propositions surrounding the similarity of the domains, expressed in terms of the overlap in segmentation, integration, culture and values and strength of the boundaries between the two domains, which is expressed in terms of permeability, flexibility and blending. For example, Clark further proposed that where domains are similar, weak borders will facilitate greater use of work-family balance. Similarly, where the domains are too dissimilar, strong borders will facilitate work-family balance. UNDP (1996) describes the strong ‘inside/outside’ dichotomy in Pakistan (a Muslim majority country), where women are restricted to the ‘inside’ space of home and household. This restricts women's access to education, employment, training opportunities and social services. Further, even women with careers face the problem that they cannot live independently but rather require a male to look after them (Ali 2013). When such Muslim women migrate to the Western countries and choose to work then they sometimes face the issue of balancing work and life related issues due to strong expectations of their households to focus on family values. In summary, Clark’s conceptualisation helps us understand how boundaries of work and life are rigidly defined for MMW.

Introducing the concept of *influence* and *centrality* in such a cross-domain movement, Clark suggested that border-crossers or participants who move across from one border (work or family domain) will find such movement much easier if they have high levels of work domain centrality and influence. Participants who move from one border to another need to have a good cultural understanding of their work domain, must possess responsibility in a group, have connections and interactions with peers in the work domain. In terms of work influence, participants must have personal competence, power and autonomy in making

rational choices in their domain. In the absence of centrality and influence participants may find access to WLB policies difficult. This is a critical point in the context of this paper as migrant Muslim women from the East may not possess such levels of centrality and influence relative to their 'other' female and male co-workers in Western work settings. Thus we propose:

Proposition 1a: Well-educated and networked Muslim migrant women who voluntarily or involuntarily exercise active agency are more likely to benefit from WLB and other family friendly policies offered by employers in Western workplaces.

Proposition 1: Well-educated and networked Muslim migrant women who do not voluntarily or involuntarily exercise active agency are less likely to benefit from WLB and other family friendly policies offered by employers in Western workplaces.

Within the above stream of work, there are work, personal and family domain factors that variously affect work and family life outcomes. Our interest in this paper, however, is to understand how work, personal and family domain factors are related to WLB and related family-friendly work approaches. In a major study examining 1080 correlations from 178 samples, Michel et al. (2010) in a review of antecedents of work-family conflict and family-work conflict review found several WLB and work scheduling flexibility approaches to be associated. For example, at a work domain, they found that schedule flexibility and family friendly policies are negatively correlated to work-to-family conflict. Similarly, internal locus of control is negatively related to work-t-family conflict. Social and family support are negatively associated with family-to-work conflict. In the above domains of WLB, gender and marital status act as moderators in the work/family conflict outcomes.

Further, our interest lies in how WLB affects minority groups such as Muslim women, particularly migrant Muslim women working in Western nations. The following section reviews an emerging body of literature on Muslim migrant women and WLB and related concepts of WFC and FWC.

In a meta-analytic review undertaken by Eby and colleagues (2005), the researchers found that within the work and family domain, work/family relationships are extremely complex. Further, gender is intensely entrenched in research on this topic. There are significant differences between how men and women experience work/family conflict and that the antecedents of such conflict also differ, for both men and women. There is an increasing body of research, which suggests that relative to men, women in professional occupations find it harder to relax and manage their stressors in both work and family domains (Frankenhaeuser et al. 1989; Lundberg and Frankenhaeuser 1999; Parasurman and Simmers 2001). Similarly, even research on career couples found women to display increased stressors than men (Lewis and Cooper 1987). Further, others have found that relative to men, women are lesser beneficiaries of WLB arrangements offered by organisations (Moen and Sweet 2002). In view of strong sex role stereotypes, it is not surprising to see that women are disproportionately affected, and such stereotypes often result in women having to restructure their work lives to fulfil familial demands as compared to males (Karambayya and Reilly 1992), as well as utilize any available flexibility in work to maintain WLB (Loscocco 1997) and quality of family life (Staines and Pleck 1986).

Having critically reviewed the vast and complex extant literature, which was predominantly quantitative and focusing on WLB in a Western context, we now discuss, the need for WLB

in the context of MMW at three levels: socio-cultural context, organisational and individual levels. In doing so we come up with testable propositions for future research.

Understanding Muslim migrant women (MMW) at work in Western Contexts

In this section, we reveal the multiple challenges faced by Muslim migrant women because of the interweaving of work, gender, ethnicity, religion and country of origin and host countries' socio-cultural contexts. In terms of our relational understanding of WLB of MMW in the West, we present a multi-level understanding of WLB issues of MMW.

Hakim (2006) found high levels of workforce participation by women and friendly work-family policies can reduce the incidence of gender equality. Noor (2002) for example, in a study of 310 Malaysian women with familial responsibilities found work-family conflict to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction. Examining the direct, mediated and moderated effects of locus of control on job satisfaction and stress, Noor (2002) found that locus of control was negatively correlated to work-family conflict and stress and positively associated with job satisfaction. Locus of control had a direct effect, partial mediating effect and a significant moderating effect on job satisfaction. In a similar vein, studying self-reported career paths of 32 Lebanese women, Tlaiss (2014) found that the uptake of modern management practices by most Middle Eastern women had a limited uptake in Middle Eastern and non-western societies and that only where individual human agentic processes was strong and positive, was there some openness to uptake and adopt new and flexible management practices. Rehman and Roomi (2012) found WLB to be an antecedent for women entrepreneurship in Pakistan as the need to manage family-work conflict and the institutional pressures associated in a male-dominated and patriarchal society, a number of Muslim women resorted to small business and enterprise to support their family's financial

needs. Examining entrepreneurial contexts, Essers and Benschop (2009) explore how Moroccan and Turkish origin women negotiate the influences of Islam, national culture and gender in the Netherlands. Again, the impact of individual women agentic processes is seen as critical in balancing the tensions at the intersection of religion, ethnicity and gender in producing favourable outcomes.

The influence of socio-contextual factors on Muslim migrant women at work

While there have been several studies examining Muslim women's attitudes and work-related experiences in their home countries (Brah 1994; Jamali et al. 2005; Madipelli et al. 2013; Rehman and Roomi 2005; Sidani 2005; Syed and Ali 2013), our understanding of MMW in Western contexts (Read and Bartkowski 2000; Syed and Pio 2010) is still emerging.

Scholars have highlighted the impact of national and cultural context on gender equality at work. For example, drawing on European data, Lyness and Kropff (2005) found that the degree of national gender equality is an important contextual variable that positively influences flexible work arrangement and supportive work-family culture. It is now accepted that national and socio-cultural contexts, such as countries of origin and host countries' cultures, influences migrant workers differently, hence it is imperative to consider it while studying migration theory (Hakak and Al Ariss 2013; Ali 2013; Syed 2008a). For example, studies on MMW in Australia (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2005; Kabir and Evans 2002; Northcote et al. 2006) uncover the double disadvantage of ethnicity and gender as deterrents to participation. Yet in another study, Scott and Franzmann (2007) discover issues pertaining to religious orientation faced by Muslim women in a 'secular' workplace. They identify mixed socializing, prayer times and spaces and the dress-code as barriers to working in the 'secular' environment as potential difficulties.

Besides visible ethnic and religious markers, Boyd (1992) notes that migrant women are influenced strongly by gender regimes in their places of origin. Marked by patriarchal in some societies, Muslim migrant women are subject to specific demands in terms of family and household responsibilities (Preston and Giles 2004). For instance, Syed and Pio (2010) suggest that Muslim migrant women in the West, particularly those with family responsibilities, found complex challenges posed by the interweaving of ethnicity, religion, patriarchy, gender and migration, along with different family aspirations and lifestyles. Although increasing levels of institutional and cultural pressures in Islamic nations have in the main, contributed to the uptake of traditional roles such as domestic and family care roles by Muslim women, however, this pattern is gradually changing in light of new role reversals, economic pressures and hybridisation of cultural values associated with migration (Sav and Harris 2013; Sav et al. 2013; 2014). Inattention to the above changes in familial roles and reinforcement of strong patriarchal influences may lead to an ethnocentric application of Western WLB policies to minority groups such as Muslim women ultimately make such changes ineffectual.

There are significant differences between Muslim majority countries and Western countries in the cultural concepts of female modesty and gender segregation (Ali 2013; Ali and Knox 2008). This may have huge impact on migration of women from Muslim majority country to a western country in terms of practices of such norms (such as modesty, inhibition) at workplace. Syed et al. (2005) have highlighted the impact of religio-cultural context on emotional labour and societal expectations of female modesty. In Islamic traditions, it is the responsibility of a husband to economically support his wife and children; therefore, there is relatively limited incentive and opportunity for women to engage in paid work. While Islamic law permits women to work, actual expectations of Islamic conditions for female employment and female conduct at job are relatively stricter than those for men (Syed et al.,

2005). Syed et al (2005) argue that while Muslim female modesty occurs as a value in many cultures, it is a particularly explicit and strong feature of Islamic doctrine. The influence of such cultural practices is huge on working women's lives. Particularly when Muslim women are working in western country the practice of modesty and inhibition may lead to discomfort and uneasiness of both Muslim women and their colleagues. This is explored in a study on Muslim women in Australian workplace where the majority of women agreed that they do not feel comfortable in non-Muslim environment especially when it comes to socialising (Scott and Franzmann 2007). The study further suggests that 'while not all respondents reported experiences of discrimination in the workplace, they were unanimous in identifying that their most pressing concern relates to attending social functions associated with work where alcohol is served and alcohol consumption is encouraged, either during office hours or at functions held outside office hours' (Scott and Franzmann 2007: 281). This lack of socialising due to religious reasons may hinder the process of networking at workplace which leads to other consequences affecting performance and career development (Ali and Kramar 2014). This gives rise to our second future research proposition:

Proposition 2: Muslim migrant woman will face greater challenges and increased complexity in accessing WLB policies due to the interweaving of ethnicity, religion and gender owing to diverse socio-cultural, religious, and gender norms in Western countries.

The influence of employment contexts on Muslim migrant women at work

Considerable literature shows that women's participation in the workplace is largely to contribute to household income (Jenkins 1992; Bhavnini 1994; Austen and Birch 2000). In a recent study conducted with Muslim migrant women in Australia by Samani (2013), it was revealed that almost all participants were working to support their families. For example, 3

participants working full-time revealed that they were the sole providers of the family; 10 shared responsibilities with their spouses for providing a family income; the rest said that they supplement the family income. Therefore, it is interesting to note that although in Islamic culture women should ideally take care of house and children, the Muslim migrant women participate in labour market due to economic reasons.

Samani (2013) in her study on Muslim migrant women in Australia revealed that one of the ways in which women found that seeking employment was successful was through personal and job-seekers' networks. Career guides Bolles (2012) and Holland (2011) suggest that compared with other forms of job searching, networking (making connections with others) gets the best results for getting hired. Past experience was also one factor of getting into secular workplace easy. Muslim migrant women who had been working in Muslim environment felt much easier to settle in new job (Samani 2013). Further, Muslim women who do not wear Hijab at workplace find it easier to settle in the workplace as compared to the ones who wear Hijab (Samani 2010). Nevertheless, almost all face anti-Muslim sentiments by peers at workplace. Anti-Muslim sentiments shared by colleagues can be confrontational and make Muslim women uncomfortable in the workplace (Samani 2013). This gives rise to the next future research proposition:

Proposition 3: Muslim migrant women remain disadvantaged in accessing the full benefits of WLB policies due to their limited opportunities for social networking at the workplace in Western countries.

The influence of individual attributes/attitudes on Muslim migrant women at work

There is also evidence of flexibility in adapting religion in ways that are inspiring (Syed and Pio 2010; Ali 2013). Instead of following an orthodox patriarchal interpretation of Islam (Syed and Winstanley, 2005), women use their agency to practice religion according to the specific events they are exposed to. For example, the perception that Muslim women are not supposed to work like men but they do work due to many reasons such as economic factors (Syed and Pio 2010). A recent study on Pakistani Muslim migrant women in the UK shows how migration to the UK impacted upon their gendered social and religious norms and charts the changes which have taken place across the generations (Akhtar 2014). Based on primary empirical data the study argued that Pakistani Muslim women negotiated the context of migration and settlement to reproduce and modify traditional gender norms through examining changes in the religious sphere.

From an individual perspective, it is pertinent to note that entering a new country with resettlement for self and the family, plus gaining employment can be a daunting task. For example, this leaves little room for coming to grips with employment legislation pertaining as well as equal opportunities and anti-discrimination laws (Syed and Pio 2010). In addition, fluency in the host country language is a strong predictor of migrants' chances of obtaining and keeping employment and of increased earnings levels, as an important factor of economic integration (Dustmann and Fabri 2003; OECD, 2003). A study by Ogbonna and Harris (2006) suggests that poor English language proficiency is a major contributor of workplace discrimination. This is also an issue Muslim women face in addition to race, gender and religious stereotypes (Syed and Pio 2010).

In a survey of 634 unemployed MMW in the UK Dykes and James (2009) found that a significant majority (57%) of MMWs were seeking work. Nevertheless, owing to familial and cultural inhibitors, 39% of MMWs expressed their ability work. Of these, 2% believed that working was against their family 'honour' (or 'Izzat' with emphases in Urdu, p.5), 49%

said their domestic responsibilities prevented them from working, another 24% said their inability to work was primarily due to lack of support from their husband and family members. This research concluded that “that these women are hindered in gaining employment less by unsurmountable religious or cultural influences and more by a fundamental lack of training, appropriate childcare facilities, tailored engagement and a basic lack of confidence” (Dykes and James 2009). In view of the above we present the final proposition:

Proposition 4: Active human agency demonstrated by MMW is likely to have a positive impact on their ability to access WLB in Western workplaces.

TOWARDS A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

While our review suggests an increasing focus on WLB issues of MMWs at a singular level, by developing a multi-level understanding such as the one presented above, we can advance the relationality in organizational studies (Ozbilgin, 2006). To this end, our attempt to present WLB issues of MMW at a societal/socio-cultural, organisational contexts and agentic levels presents an opportunity to develop an integrated understanding of how various levels interact and impact on the phenomenon under consideration. For example, the macro-level societal and socio-cultural factors informs the embedded nature of institutional and cultural pressures that MMW have to balance in a Western context. Further, operating at a meso-level, our analysis and review suggests that MMW have to develop certain skills and social networks in an organisational work context to make the most of WLB policies. The issues of the strength of their network at the workplace and their own centrality in a work group is critical for successful access of WLB policies and opportunities. Finally, at a micro-level or individual

agentic level, we argue that case for MMW's 'active' human agency in benefitting from WLB policies. Flexibility and skills of persuasion and self-efficacy will be extremely critical in achieving positive WLB outcomes by MMW in Western settings. So, although the macro-level environment for MMW is relatively more favourable in Western workplace settings, the ability of MMW is still somewhat constrained due to the traditional familial role expectations by their spouse and family members. Thus, we argue that it is through the ability of MMW to foster social networks, support systems and exercise active human agency that many favourable WLB outcomes can be achieved.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research set out to undertake an integrated review of the literature by identifying the gaps and presenting a multilevel understanding of how MMW experience and manage WLB issues in Western settings. Undertaking a critical review of WLB literature, we identified the gaps WLB issues of MMWs in western settings. Of the six WLB approaches, the conceptualisation by Clark was found to be relevant for MMW as it informed us how boundaries of work and life are rigidly defined for MMWs due to cultural and religious reasons. Clark's notion of influence and centrality was particularly relevant and gave rise to the study's first proposition. We proposed that in context of well-educated and networked MMWs who exercise active agency were more likely to benefit from an organisation's WLB policies. In the case of those who do not exercise active human agency, are less likely to benefit from WLB policies. In future this proposition needs to be tested by qualitative and ex-post facto designs.

Further, we set out to explore the nature and extent of WLB opportunities and challenges at multiple levels as presented by such environments and make sense of how context shapes the world views of WLB of MMW. Analysing the literature at three levels, namely: socio-cultural, employment contexts and individual attribute/attitudes of MMW, we developed three further testable propositions. First, at a macro level, our review suggests that MMW will continue to face challenges in uptake of WLB policies due to the interweaving of ethnicity, religion and gender owing to diverse socio-cultural, religious, and gender norms in Western countries. Second, what can be seen at a meso level (employment contexts), we proposed the importance of social networks of MMWs in Western workplaces in accessing WLB policies and opportunities. Third, at a micro level, we proposed how active human agency can achieve positive WLB outcomes for MMWs.

In light of the above, several managerial implications arise. Overall, for promoting equality, diversity and fairness at workplace and reducing the 'triple paralysis', which is often faced by ethnic minorities such as MMW, managers must first of all adhere to the prevailing equality and diversity laws and family friendly policies for WLB. Second, managers should consciously develop an awareness of equality. Equality does not necessarily mean treating everybody equally. Minority groups such as MMW need to be treated differently. Equal opportunities is one such way for ensuring equality. At a macro level, nation states should ensure that minority groups such as MMWs are integrated within the mainstream workforce. The study by Dykes and James (2009) has already highlighted the need for such social integration and support. At a meso level, organisations will need to work alongside the state to ensure that WLB and family friendly policies are designed, developed and implemented appropriately. Finally, to advance active human agency, managers must provide opportunities and motivational environment for MMW to develop their knowledge, skills and capabilities.

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