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EXPLORING WHAT CONSTITUTES 'QUALITY' IN QUALITY OF WORK LIFE FOR FEMALE EMPLOYEES

Abstract: *Purpose* –The purpose of this paper is to assess the Quality of work life among female employees in private sector in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study intends to explore the significant factors constituting Quality of work life for female employees.

Methodology –The study mainly uses survey approach. A total of 200 survey questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of female employees working in the private companies across different industries. The research uses descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in analyzing data.

Findings –The findings suggest that factors considered vital and significant in Quality of work life by female employees are job satisfaction and growth opportunities. Results indicate a positive and significant link between Quality of work life and seven constructs used in the study. Majority of female employees in Saudi are young, ambitious and expect improvements in the overall Quality of work life.

Originality/Value- The research contributes to the extant literature on Quality of work life. The findings can be used by policy makers to design and implement suitable initiatives in order to improve the existing QWL and bring a meaningful change at work place. The findings present insight for other professionals and stakeholders as well.

Keywords: *Quality of work life, Quality of life, Female employees, Saudi Arabia Paper type – Research paper*

1. Introduction

Quality of work life has been studied for over five decades now (Walton, 1973; Mirvis and Lawler, 1984; Fields and Thacker, 1992; Sirgy et al., 2001; Johnsrud, 2002; Cheung and Tang, 2009; Sahni 2015;

Yadav and Naim, 2017) however, little attention has been paid to the gender perspective on Quality of work life. Since employees differ in their needs, perceptions, personality, liking and priorities, same is true with what is considered as high quality of work life among different employees. The factors which are associated with high or expected levels of quality of work life for male employee perhaps may or may not be the same for female employees. For female

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employees, work occupies an important place in their lives, the status of quality of work life affect not only their physical but also social, psychological and spiritual well-being. Therefore the quest of this study is to find out the main factors associated with “Quality” in Quality of work life (QWL) among female employees.

According to Straw and Heckscher (1984), QWL is a philosophy, a set of principles, which holds that people are the most important resource in the organization as they are trustworthy, responsible and capable of making valuable contribution hence, they should be treated with dignity and respect. Quality of work life is considered to be the quality of association between employees and the total working environment: with human dimensions, technical and economic consideration. In other words, QWL could be measured on factors such as; work-life balance, job satisfaction and contentment, career advancement opportunities and so on. Recently, the organizational responses to the changing needs of working families resulted in the concept of Flexible work arrangements (FWA). FWA can take many forms, but most options involve giving employees greater control over when and where work gets done and how much time employees choose to work (Harrington and Hall, 2007). Therefore, this becomes an important part of balancing employees’ work and life resulting in higher degree of QWL for employees.

Employees are the most essential and critical resource for any organization. Therefore, human resource practices need to be more strategic in their approach (Allui and Sahni, 2016). To satisfy the employees, organizations must ensure that a minimum quality prevails in the work environment. The Quality of work life has also been associated with outcomes like productivity (Lawler & Ledford, 1981), business performance (Lau and May, 1998; Nayak and Sahoo, 2015), career related factors (Rose et al., 2006), performance in growth and profitability (Lau, 2000) and

organizational effectiveness (Islam and Siengthai, 2009; Sahni, 2016).

Saudi Arabia is known to be world’s largest oil producer and the largest country in the Arab Middle East region. The private sector in Saudi Arabia contributes largely in the GDP. The sector is growing at a much faster pace; this can be attributed to the most promising Vision 2030 which calls for the private sector to play a great role in attracting talent and hiring young people. Private sector has opened doors for female employees where the nation plans to increase the number of women in the workforce substantially (Arab news). This is evident with the increased number of female employees registered at the General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI), Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the Saudization program is also directed towards greatly increasing women jobs in the private sector whereby Saudi Arabia is currently enhancing the establishment of job opportunities for women. Women participation in the workforce is expected to increase gradually by 2020. Particularly when the world is moving towards more inclusive workplace it is important to provide conducive and supportive working environment for all types of employees (Barak, 2016). To enhance and advance the existing quality of work life is essential not only to satisfy the employees, but also to compete in the market with exemplary policies, creating advanced societies that provide equal opportunities for men and women.

Against this backdrop, this study will examine quality of work life for women employees working in private sector of Saudi Arabia. Therefore the research question is “What constitutes ‘quality’ in quality of work life for female employees?” The motivations for this research to be conducted are; 1) with the changing trend of women participation in workforce, what is the existing quality of work life in Saudi private sector companies and 2) to explore what constitutes ‘quality’ in quality of work life for female employees.

The paper is structured as follows: first, an introductory section, second section presents literature review on the past studies on Quality of work life in general and in particular to women. The third section deals with methodology, followed by the results of the study in the form of findings and discussion. Conclusion is presented next with the theoretical and practical contributions of this study and limitations and way for future research.

2. Literature review

This section reviews the studies conducted on the subject of quality of work life and studies conducted on women and quality of work life.

2.1. An overview of QWL studies

The evolution of QWL began in the United States, in 1970s, when the first international conference on QWL was organized, in the following years the humanization of work was focused through quality of the relationship between worker and the work environment. Since then it has been defined by many researchers in a variety of ways; however, no comprehensive attempt has been made to study QWL from female employee's perspective. QWL includes aspects of work-related life such as wages and hours, work environment, benefits and services, career prospects and human relations, which is possibly relevant to worker satisfaction and motivation. Howard C. Carlson (1993), the director of QWL research and administration, General Motors Corporation of USA describes Quality of work life (QWL) as two things; a goal and an on-going process for achieving it.

The early advocates of Quality of work life concept, Walton (1974), argued that QWL is getting importance as a way to rescue human and environmental values that have been neglected in favour of technological advancement of the productivity and

economic growth. Hackman and Oldham (1976), focussed on psychological growth needs as pertinent to quality of work life. Similarly, a number of past studies have identified such needs; work involvement, life satisfaction, autonomy, happiness, safe work environment, advancement opportunities, work overload and job stress (Warr et al., 1979; Mirvis and Lawler 1984; Baba and Jamal, 1991). Therefore in this era of early 1970 to early 1990, studies were focussed on identifying and exploring the meaning and elements of Quality of work life. In studies in the next era (1990-2017), efforts were made to understand the complex relationship of Quality of work life with different factors (both individual and organizational).

Danna and Griffin (1999), in their study, explored the concept of QWL as incorporating a hierarchy of perspectives which include work factors and also factors that broadly reflect life satisfaction and general feelings of well-being. A study by Rose et al., (2006) unlike the past studies, examined the relationship of QWL with the variables mostly related to career. Their study contributes in establishing a positive relationship between aspiration and career achievement, QWL is linked to career development and career is evolving from such interaction of individual within the organization. Rethinam and Ismail (2007), in their study reviewed the concept of QWL and its impact on information and technology professionals in Malaysia. The dimensions of QWL selected were mostly work related and it was recommended that organizations must identify ways and means to improve the approach in minimizing the adverse impact of changes in work environment and consider more humanistic factors.

The concept of quality of work life is closely related to the concept of Quality of life, a variety of QWL programs were found to be related to quality of life (Sirgy et al., 2008). Correspondingly, a study by Narehan et al., (2014) established a significant relationship between quality of work life (QWL)

programs and quality of life (QOL) in general. They found that emotional well being and personal development are the factors that have an impact on the general quality of work life of employees. A recent review by Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2013), underlines the significance of the multidimensional concept of quality of work life to attract and retain human talent. Moreover, the significance of QWL in the literature can be found in direct linkages with organizational performance and effectiveness. In a recent study by Alfonso et al., (2016), the mediating role of quality of work life was examined in the relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational citizenship behaviour. They found that a high quality of working life was associated with variable called sportsmanship behaviours.

The concept of QWL (Quality of work life) has been in existence for a long time now, unfortunately with little attention of researchers in this part of the world (Middle East Region). Past studies done on QWL in Saudi Arabia reflect the importance of enhancing the quality of work life that would result in higher job satisfaction and higher retention rate of employees (Almalki et al., 2012; Almarshad, 2015; Khan and Agha, 2013; Lee et al., 2015;).

2.2. QWL and Women

QWL is multifaceted concept that covers different dimensions of an employee: physical, social, psychological and environmental. The subject has been broadly studied as a general concept at different industries, workplaces and different countries. However, few studies were focussed on QWL for women employees (Schwartz, 1989; Doherty, 2004; Doble and Supriya, 2010; Tabassum et al., 2011; Karkoulia et al., 2016). The policies on work life balance needs to be improved and practiced to enhance Quality of work life (Doble and Supriya 2010). Moen and Yu (2000) found that some characteristics of the

work environment predict QWL differently for men and women. It suggests that autonomy on job is positively related to coping or mastery for men and negatively related to their experience of overload. Having the option to negotiate work hours is related to lower overload for women, while being able to work at home tends to predict fewer stress symptoms for men. Doherty (2004) explored the work balance initiatives in hospitality industry of UK. The study contributes in identifying the main barriers to women's progression in senior positions and how initiatives taken for work life balance can be effective and helpful. A recent empirical study by Karkounlian et al., (2016), with a sample of 320 employees of the Lebanese banking sector were studied to find out the role of gender. The relationship between work-life balance, perceived stress, and locus of control were examined.

Women are the frontlines of family and society; moreover they are equally participating in the labour force as well. It is imperative to understand the perception and expectation of women in workforce regarding quality of work life. Therefore, literature review suggests that there are just a handful of studies which have explored the concept of QWL from this perspective. To close this gap, present study will try to answer the main question "what constitutes 'Quality' in QWL for female employees?"

3. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to examine and assess the Quality of work life among female employees. The study was conducted on a random sample of full time female employees working in private sector companies located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This section focuses on the variables, survey instrument, data collection approach and steps to data analysis.

3.1. Variables studied

Following seven dimensions of QWL were identified on the basis of literature review; job satisfaction, working conditions, opportunity for growth, work life balance, stress free work, social relationship and organizational culture and communication.

3.1.1. Job Satisfaction

The job satisfaction is measured by the employee's positive feelings with their job and career. Job satisfaction is reflected in questions whether employee considers the work enjoyable. Job satisfaction has been commonly studied across industries and the contribution of job satisfaction to Quality of work life has been found in previous studies (Rethinam and Ismail, 2007).

3.1.2. Working Condition

Working conditions covers a wide range of aspects at work like the fundamental resources, physical conditions, safety and security necessary to perform effectively. Working conditions have a great influence on employee's quality of work life. Organizations must provide a safe, adequate and clean working environment for its employees (Mirvis and Lawler, 1984). The physical environment such as architecture, equipment, noise, lighting, decoration and use of plants, is likely to make an impact upon person's achievement, affective satisfaction, and psychological strain. Moreover, supervisor's support appears to be an important part of quality of work life. Working condition is a common element of QWL found in the past studies (Walton 1974; Mirvis and Lawler 1984; Sirgy et al., 2001; Mosadeghrad et al., 2011)

3.1.3. Opportunity for continued growth

Employees during their working life, generally expect growth and development in their jobs. QWL encompasses the career

development policies used within the organization which provides and shares a clear career path for employees. Training programmes are perceived as a means to achieve growth. In any organization training and development programs intend at enhancing the 'learning experiences' for employees such that it helps in both employee and organization development. The opportunity available for growth and career development has been directly associated with QWL (Rose et al., 2006).

3.1.4. Work Life balance

The work life balance examines if the employer is supportive in balancing the work and family life of employees. The support can be in numerous forms like, providing adequate facilities at work, allowing flexibility at workplace in the form of flexible working hours. Studies in past have mentioned about the significance of having strategies in place to ensure a proper work life balance for employees (Mosadeghrad et al., 2011; Sahni 2015)

3.1.5. Stress-free work

Stress has become one of the most serious occupational health hazards today. If employees experience excessive pressures at work, they might feel stressed which can lead to various psychosomatic diseases. It is assessed through questions dealing with work demand and perception of stress and actual work overload. Workers are required to accept certain goals, often imposed as task demands arising from their job description. This is requirement of job when exceeds a limit, it can be experienced as stressful (Warr, 1994). In their study, Ducharme and Martin (2000) established in their study that high job pressure is inversely and significantly related to satisfaction. Similarly, psychological well being of employees is as important as physical well being. Recent studies have shown that the challenges faced in the workplace and the

continuous demands of personal life results in an imbalance and this ultimately leads to stress. Managing and coping with the stress is essential to ensure the well-being of both employee and the organization to safeguard the performance of business (Sahni, 2016).

3.1.6. Social Relationship in Organization

The relationship an employee has with immediate work group has a substantial influence on the QWL. If the member of their work group has a high sense of job responsibility and work as a team, it may increase efficiency and productivity of the employees. The type of relationship that exists in the team and between management and the employees affects the perception of satisfaction among the employees. The social relationship surrounding a person in the organization is an important dimension of QWL. Social support takes place in the form of emotional security and help with other things. Support received from one's co-workers and boss is found to contribute significantly to a range of context free variables, such as low anxiety, depressed and somatic symptoms and high self esteem (Warr, 1994). Past studies have reflected upon the significant association of social relationship on QWL (Sirgy et al., 2001; Mosadeghrad et al., 2011).

3.1.7. Organizational culture and communication

Culture is a pattern of learned behaviour that is shared among the members of an Organization. It develops a sense of identity and uniqueness within every organization through values, norms and language that people share. Related dimensions of the organizational culture may be analyzed from various perspectives. In accordance with the present research analysis, the multidimensional nature of organizational culture will be investigated in terms of involvement, collaboration, transmission of information, expression of grievances,

corporate communication, coordination and integration. Organizational communication can be measured as the degree to which members are informed and lines of communications are open between superior and subordinate.

3.2. Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was prepared after a thorough literature review. Items were adapted from quality of work life scale designed by Easton and Van Laar (2012). The scale had seven broad categories; job satisfaction, communication, support from manager/supervisor, freedom from stress at work, salary and additional benefits, relationships with work, colleague involvement and responsibility at work. Similarly the survey instrument used in this study consists of 27 items covering seven variables; job satisfaction, working conditions, opportunity for growth, work life balance, stress management, social relationship and organizational culture and communication.

3.3. Data collection approach

Data was collected primarily through survey instruments; however, few interviews were also conducted to validate the responses. The instrument consists of two sections; Section A solicits demographic information such as age, marital status, length of services and educational background. Section B comprises of a set of objective statements to assess the prevailing QWL practices. Participants were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of the statements on a 5-point Likert scale (5 being strongly agree and 1 strongly disagree). The questionnaire was distributed with the help of online survey- survey monkey. A total of 121 filled surveys were received, however, only 109 surveys were completely filled by respondents and therefore a set of 109 responses were used for data analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

The data collected from 109 completely filled surveys are entered in SPSS. Data analysis is performed in three steps; first, descriptive profile of the participants and variables is explained, second, correlation analysis to establish the relationship between various construct, third step assesses structural model using Partial least square method to identify the link in answering the research question.

4. Findings

4.1. Profile of participants

Table 1 presents a brief profile of participants. Out of the total sample of 109

female employees, majority of them were between 31-40 years of age (47.7 percent) followed by 21-30 years (37.16 percent), under 21 years (11 percent) and 41-50 years (3.67 percent). The majority of respondents had bachelor's degree (66 percent) and 26.6 percent had a master's degree. In terms of work experience, 24.77 percent of respondent had less than one years experience, 36.7 percent had experience between one to three years and only 16.5 percent had more than 5 years experience. More than half of the female employees were married (58.7 percent) and 33 percent of respondents were unmarried as per the marital status. The random samples are broadly representative in terms of the profile and populations in private sector.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participants Profile	Frequency	Percentage
WORK EXPERIENCE		
0-1 Years	27	24.77
1-3 Years	40	36.70
3-5 Years	24	22.02
More than 5 Years	18	16.51
AGE		
Under 21 Years	12	11.01
21-30 Years	41	37.16
31-40 Years	52	47.71
41-50 Years	4	3.67
51 or Older	0	0
QUALIFICATION		
Diploma/ Certificate	8	7.3
Graduate	72	66.06
Post Graduate	29	26.61
MARITAL STATUS		
Un Married	36	33.03
Married	64	58.72
Divorcee/ Separated	9	8.26
Widow	0	0.00

4.2. Profile of variables: Descriptive statistics and Correlation analysis

Table 2 represents the mean, standard deviation, inter-correlation between variables under study. Female employees working in private companies perceive their working conditions to be good; however the work life balance, social relationship and stress free work received the lowest mean score of 3.4, 3.3 and 3.2 respectively. They perceived organizational culture and communication to be moderate. Results

depict a strong and positive relationship between overall QWL and different constructs. The coefficient of correlation is significant at .001 levels. The strongest correlation of QWL was found to be with job satisfaction (0.848), opportunities for growth (0.831) and organizational culture (0.805). QWL was found to be moderately related with Work life balance and Stress free work with 0.592 and 0.601 values of coefficient of correlation significant at 0.01 levels. Support was found for this relationship, however not very strong.

Table 2. Mean, SD, inter-correlation between variables under study

Variable	Mean	SD	JS	WC	OG	WLB	SFW	SR	OCC
Job Satisfaction(JS)	3.65	1.01	1						
Working Conditions(WC)	4.36	1.21	.697**	1					
Opportunities for Growth(OG)	3.15	1.3	.658**	.643**	1				
Work Life Balance(WLB)	3.4	1.11	.449**	.472**	.462**	1			
Stress Free work(SFW)	3.3	1.07	.483**	.479**	.459**	.374**	1		
Social Relationships(SR)	3.08	1.42	.676**	.622**	.617**	.474**	.477**	1	
Organizational Culture and Communication (OCC)	3.53	1.3	.687**	.602**	.590**	.373**	.462**	.712**	1
Quality of work life(QWL)	3.6	0.91	0.848	0.803	0.801	0.592	0.601	0.816	0.825

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

4.3. Partial Least Square

Partial least square approach has been implemented to analyze the relationships among different constructs of quality of work life. SmartPLS has been adopted for the use (Ringle et al., 2005). It is considered that convergent validity is achieved if loadings of the measures to their respective constructs is at least 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Kline, 2005). In addition, composite reliability (CR) of all constructs are above

0.6 and average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 3 reflects the loadings, CR and AVE of the constructs. The research use Quality of work life as second order factor. Composite reliability (CR) of all constructs can be seen from the table to be above 0.6 and average variance extracted (AVE) are found to be above 0.5.

Table 3. Loading, CR and AVE

Construct	Item code	Loading	CR	AVE
Job Satisfaction(JS)	JS1	0.628	0.715	0.691
	JS2	0.859		
	JS3	0.615		
	JS4	0.704		
Working Conditions(WC)	WC1	0.793	0.752	0.582
	WC2	0.733		
	WC3	0.731		
Opportunities for Growth(OG)	OG1	0.739	0.685	0.628
	OG2	0.618		
	OG3	0.872		
Work Life Balance(WLB)	WLB1	0.876	0.805	0.548
	WLB2	0.674		
Stress Free work(SFW)	SFW1	0.624	0.828	0.661
	SFW2	0.791		
	SFW3	0.775		
Social Relationships(SR)	SR1	0.672	0.806	0.563
	SR2	0.741		
	SR3	0.72		
	SR4	0.612		
	SR5	0.75		
Organizational Culture and Communication(OCC)	OCC1	0.716	0.848	0.528
	OCC2	0.851		
	OCC3	0.811		
	OCC4	0.857		
	OCC5	0.748		
	OCC6	0.768		
	OCC7	0.758		
Quality of work life(QWL)	QWL		0.915	0.5

5. Discussion

The study has established that the main factors in explaining quality for work life for female employees are job satisfaction, availability of growth opportunities and organizational culture. The findings will enable the management to improve the well-being of the employees particularly women in the organization. The relationships

between different facets of work life that predict overall quality of work life was strong enough to predict the levels of QWL. The findings would help the organizations to focus resources and energy on those aspects that could make a considerable difference in the work life. The findings suggest that the overall QWL perceived by sample of working women is moderate and does not meet the expectations. Employees who

experience higher job satisfactions usually are found to be less absent, less likely to leave, display strong commitment, and are satisfied with the overall QWL. The work life balance that was depicted in this study as significant predictor of satisfaction with quality of work life, there is an urgent requirement to advance the work life balance by having more flexible work arrangements at the work place. However, the new policies of Saudi Arabia have flexible work options as integral part and seen as a welcome change.

In some cases, it was seen that workplaces where employees experience higher workload demands can also be those with higher quality of work life. Employees in work places with higher quality of working life in the research tended to have more autonomy and control, and often chose to work harder. The majority of female employees experience stress at work in the private companies. Similarly, majority of them are also juggling go maintain a work life balance. Almost half of the female employees feel underpaid for the work they do. Most of the female working in private sector are performing administrative roles and very few were found to be in the leadership position. The findings suggest there is a need to create jobs that are more meaningful, such jobs are more satisfying and give a greater personal stimulus to development than routine tasks. The findings were found to be consistent with previous study which suggests that a significant difference exists between male and female employees QWL (Doherty, 2004; Tabassum et al., 2011)

The findings of the present study have provided answers to the research questions. This study provides valuable information about how female employees in organizations view the work environment and how it can be improved to influence the overall effectiveness in the organization.

6. Conclusions

Gathering data on how employees view the organization can help chart a direction for addressing a range of human resource challenges. A good human resource practice would encourage employees to be more productive while enjoying their work. Saudi female employees are ambitious and expect improvements in the ways organization works. Majority of female employees are young and more receptive to change. The findings suggest that factors considered imperative to 'Quality' in Quality of work life by female employees are job satisfaction and growth opportunities. Results indicate a positive and significant link between Quality of work life and seven constructs used in the study.

6.1. Research contribution to Theory and Practice

The study advances the work in the field of Quality of work life by examining the factors associated with high QWL as perceived by women at work. The findings inform decision makers and policy makers in private sector companies in indentifying the key factors associated with QWL for women employees. Accordingly, initiatives may be implemented to enhance the overall quality at the work place and retain female employees in private sector.

The research contributes to the extant literature on Quality of work life. The findings can be used by policy makers to devise and implement suitable initiatives in order to improve the existing QWL and bring a meaningful change at workplace. The findings present insight for other professionals and stakeholders as well.

6.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Though adequate care has been taken while doing the present research but still suffers from certain limitations. The data collection

was restricted to female employees in private companies only. Future researchers can expand the scope of this study by including public sector and government organizations across different industries. The variables contributing to QWL are only representative in nature. But these variables are carefully selected and tested for their reliability on a smaller sample. Future studies can also

incorporate comparisons on demographics levels like age and marital status, which can have an influence on QWL perception in employees. The overall findings of the study are encouraging. The interpretation and specification of the quality of work life and its effectiveness that were empirically examined in the present study must be regarded as tentative.

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