




Exploring Parental Stress and Professional Workload Among Women Head Teachers of Elementary Schools

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Submitted 15.03.2024 Accepted 07.06.2024 Published 30.06.2024</p> <p>Volume No. 11 Issue No. I ISSN (Online) 2414-8512 ISSN (Print) 2311-293X DOI:</p> <p>Keywords: Parental Stress, Professional Workload</p>	<p><i>Working mothers in Pakistan have to fulfill professional duties with family duties which often lead to parental stress. This phenomenology study is aimed to explore the phenomenon of parental stress due to professional workload in the light of experiences of headmistresses who are mothers and are working in Elementary schools of Faisalabad during academic year 2023-2024. Only those headmistresses were selected through purposive sampling who have children between the age of 0 to 12 years. Children at this age group need full attention of parents especially mothers for their holistic development. Eight participants were interviewed and asked questions to explore workload, experiences regarding parental stress and strategies to cope with parental stress. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis using NVivo 14. The participants revealed they have no coping strategy to balance workload and parental stress.</i></p> 

Introduction

In the countries with patriarchal mindset, the man is perceived as only breadwinner of the family and the prime duty of woman is to take care the children, family, and the house. The role of the woman as a mother becomes critical due to the natural and emotional attachment with her children. The family depends on the mother for good parenting and nurturing of children. Parents and children bonding nurtures the physical, emotional, and social development of child. which has a lasting impact on the personality and cognitive health of the child (Singh, 2019). Overall, the tradition of having one breadwinner for the family is sloped down in past decades in Pakistan. The trend of working women raised with the hit of Feminism in 1980's in Pakistan (Almani, Abro and Mugheri, 2012).

Currently, according to the World Bank Indicator of Labor force, the participation rate of female in labor force in Pakistan ages 15-64 has reported 23.3 % in 2022. The working mothers not only have to engaged in household responsibilities, but they also have to fulfill professional commitments along with caring their children and family (Zemon & Bahr, 2005). Hence, role strain occurs when working mothers have to play multiple roles with exhausted time and energy (Goode, 1960). Working mothers have reported higher levels of parental stress as compared to fathers (Shin and McDonough (2008). Working women in Pakistan have many responsibilities beyond her capacity, with lots of problems. Problems with time management, no compromise from family as well as workplace and insecurity cause high blood pressure, anxiety and depression in working women (Kausar and Anwar, 2015).

Parenting is a tough job. Psychological and sociological theories have revealed that parent-child

interaction is affected by numerous factors at workplace and to a different place (Heinrich, 2014). Due to ongoing stress at workplaces, parents may withdraw interaction with children at home (Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, and McHale, 1999). When parents are unable to fulfill emotional and other requirements of their children and neglect them due to other responsibilities, the stress arises. This kind of stress is particularly associated with parenting which is called parental stress. It affects both domains i.e., children's and parents (Abidin and Brunner, 1995). Parental stress is associated with the mental health problems of parents like depression and anxiety (Lovejoy, Graczyk, O'Hare, and Neuman, 2000). It occurs due to emotional problems, behavioral problems, academic problems, and social issues of children (Neece, Green and Baker, 2012). It has broad impact not only on parents and children but also their relationship resulting increased depression, high level of anxiety and fatigue in parents. Parental stress leads to diverse outcomes of children emotional and behavioral problems, socio-emotional dysfunctions, and lower social competence (Jones and Prinz, 2005). Patience and tolerance of parents towards their children are effected by parental stress and is risk factor for child internalizing problems (Bayer, Sanson and Hemphill, 2006).

Purpose of Study

Daily hassles in parenting also affects parents emotional well-being, so their daily cores get disturb (Dietz and Jennings, 2007). Working women have to play multiple roles inside and outside home. Long working hours and less leisure time, increases level of stress and effects the wellbeing of working mothers. Work-family conflicts associated with high level of parental stress in working mothers were reported higher as compared to fathers (Shin and McDonough, 2008). A phenomenology study in UK to explore phenomenon of stress among pre-school teachers and concluded that the time pressure, meeting children's needs, maintaining teaching and non-teaching tasks were main sources of stress among those participants of the study. Those teachers also reported that they were powerless to complete professional tasks and feeling constraints in completion of daily chores when get stress (Sarah, 2021). School Principals play a crucial role in the provision and management of quality education in their institutes. School Principles not only influence students' achievement but also make institute successful by managing teaching and learning environment (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016). The demands of leaders and policy makers for achieving aims and goals for sustainable development of quality education can lead to heavy workload, professional commitments and sometimes deadlock between professional and personal responsibilities. School head teachers, who are mothers too, used to neglect their children's needs to fulfill their professional responsibilities (Hauseman, 2020). The imbalance between parental responsibilities and professional responsibilities triggers parental stress. Bloom (2004) claimed that the principals do not fail in their career due to lack of determination or knowledge but they fail due to imbalance between work and personal life.

School head teachers in Pakistan have to face many challenges due to scarcity of resources and insufficient budgets. Maintenance and provision of high-quality education, interpersonal relationship, clashes among colleagues and administration, professional responsibilities are sources of stress (Simkins, Garrett, Memon, & Ali, 1998). Female administrators have identified an devastating workload as a major dilemma (Loder, 2005). High school headteachers have to work almost sixty to eighty hours per week. Shafiq and Shahzadi (2020) in their study claimed that headteachers of Gujrat have high level of depression and anxiety as compared to the estimated value by WHO. The professional responsibilities demand more time from school headteachers. They perform under tense circumstances and unsatisfactory working conditions. Sometimes their tasks are quite risky and complicated (Hussain, Suleman and Jumani, 2018). The workload effect their parenting style.

Literature Review

Harris and Jones (2022) claimed that the head-teachers have high job pressure due to managing emotional, contextual and cultural pressure that stakeholders and community place to focus on improvement of quality of teaching and learning. Berkovich and Eyal (2015) in their research study concluded that the increased level of work-related stress put head-teachers at the risk of emotional exhaustion. Working mothers have an intensified risk for experiencing role overload compared to other employed adults because children demand more time and attention from their mothers as compared to their father (Vilhjalmsson and Kristjansdottir, 2006). So, it impacts badly on the responsibilities of motherhood. Time management for parental and professional responsibilities can present significant leadership challenges for women school headteachers who are mothers (Loder, 2005). They get exhausted by childcare responsibilities and their home life and work life are affected by feelings of stress, tiredness, and exhaustion McGoldrick (2005). The occurrence of negative outcomes resulting from attempts to balance work and home responsibilities provide significant harm on the marriages of working women and their partner relationships, feelings of guilt, and feeling that their work performance suffered Breuning and Dixon (2007). It may arise experienced a sense of vulnerability, sense of isolation, sense of compromise and inadequacy, overwhelming sense of stress and

pressure, lack of acknowledgment and structural support in working mothers (Hirakata and Daniluk, 2009).

Work-life balance means to set clear boundaries between work and home while participating in each of the activities without interruption as mentioned by Loehr and Schwartz (2003). It demands putting full attention and energy on work at workplace while being immersed in family activities while staying at home. Different professionals manage responsibilities differently. Some of the professionals allowed their professional life to dominate on personal life while rest were squeezed by an increased focus on their personal life. Men were found better work and personal life managers as compared to working mothers (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, and Terrell, 2005). Research suggests that challenging roles of mother and principal instantaneously may lead women to choose motherhood over administration (Glass, et. al., 2000). So the women have to choose between two paths, the “mommy track” and the “career track”. Women chase the mommy track when they choose to remain in teaching rather than move into administration. Working woman in Pakistan have many responsibilities beyond her capacity, with lots of problems. Balancing work life and personal life is stressful for working mothers. Messy homes, children falling sick frequently, leaving sick children at home unattended, problems in marital life, disturbed parent child relationship, family problems etc. Kausar and Anwar (2015) in their study explored effect of stress in working women in Pakistan. Their study was conducted on teachers, bankers, and doctors. Quantitative Data was collected from 35 working women through questionnaire, while 18 women were interviewed to dig out sources of stress. The study revealed that time management, no compromise from family as well as workplace and insecurity cause high blood pressure, anxiety and depression in those women.

Similarly, Sohail, Imtiaz, and Iqbal (2018) conducted a research study on the issues faced by working mothers of Lahore and measured the impact of their job stress with the relationship between those working mothers and their adolescent children. They interviewed thirty mothers including working mothers and staying home mothers. Their research study concluded that mother child relationship are not effected by employment responsibilities. But the imbalance between parental and professional responsibilities causes stress.

Ranjha, Pasha and shah (2021) asked questions from thirty primary school headteachers Lahore, through questionnaire about work life and parental responsibilities balance. The researchers found that female headteachers don't receive support from spouse but their children support them. So, the research participants can easily balance their work and professional life. The study also claimed that the children of female headteachers of primary schools complained about the mothers not taking interest in personal life of their children. The phenomena of parental stress was not addressed in this study, neither the managing strategies were asked from participants.

Furthermore, Faiza, Majeed, and Abbas (2023) conducted a quantitative study with cross sectional approach on working women in Pakistan with the objective to investigate the effect of long working hours of mothers on their relationship with their children. For this study they selected working mothers from healthcare, the education and the banking sector. The findings showed the negative impact of long working hours on parent child relationship. The higher social support can lower the negative impact of long-working hours. But the coping strategies adopted by these 250 working mothers were not addressed. However, the researchers recommended comprehensive study to understand challenges of work-family dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical theory of the study exploring parental stress and professional workload through unveiling the lived experiences of mother headmistresses draws upon two key theoretical perspectives: theory of parenting stress and work family conflict theory.

Abidin in 1976 proposed the theory of parenting stress. This ecological theory is oldest but dominates the literature and intends to three factors of parenting stress, i.e., (i) parent factors (parental attachment, sense of competence, and depression), (ii) child factors (adaptability, acceptability, demandingness, mood, hyperactivity, and being reinforcing to parents), (iii) situational factors which implies role restriction and refers to the impact of parenthood on different life roles of parents, their health, social support or social isolation, and spousal relationship (support and relational conflict). According to this theory parenting stress negatively effects child's development and gives negative outcome. To measure parenting stress Abidin developed a scale which is an immense measure of parenting stress called The Parenting Stress Index (PSI; 1983/1995) (Abidin, and Brunner, 1995).

Berry and Jones introduced the transactional model of parental stress and viewed parenting stress as bidirectional process i.e. not only parents influences children but also parents wellbeing are effected by children (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, and Collins, 2005). They developed the Parental Stress Scale to measure parenting stresses irrespective of marital, financial, or other life stress (Lessenberry and Rehfeldt, 2004). An important characteristic of the PSS is that it was designed to measure parental stress of any kind of parents

including the nonclinical samples where mothers of children not receiving any clinical (Louie, Cromer and Berry, 2017). Parenting stress level fluctuates according to the developmental stages of children (Larson and Richard, 1991). The children of age 1 month to 12 years have to spend most of their time with their parents and need to interact frequently with their mothers. At this stage parents play crucial role in shaping children's lives and their experiences.

The work family conflict theory persist: when individuals can't balance work and family demands the conflict arises. Their work responsibilities and family responsibilities suffer for their time and energy. In case of Pakistan, working women have limited time for fulfilment of their family responsibilities due to workload (Faiza et. al.,2023).

The studies discussed in literature review were quantitative studies which didn't address the strategies of mothers to manage work life and parental life. The phenomenology studies focused on occupational stress and the phenomenon of parental stress is not yet explored in Pakistan. Therefore, this research was designed to explore how the mother headmistresses experience parental stress when they neglect their children for fulfillment of professional responsibilities and to find strategies they adopt to manage work and parental life. This study will be beneficial for the head-teachers who are mothers and need to balance parental and professional responsibilities. They can find coping strategies to manage their personal and professional life. For the teachers and working women who experience parental stress due to neglecting their children for official duties. They can get ideas for managing stress and workload. For policymakers to understand that parental stress may affect work performance of female head teachers. So, they can make policies for well-being of female employees. A phenomenological approach was adopted to describe the lived experiences of participants, who are mothers and working as head-teachers, in Elementary schools of Faisalabad, for following research objectives:

Objectives of the Study

- a. To explore professional workload of female head-teachers.
- b. To examine how professional workload causes parental stress of female head-teachers .

Research Questions

- a. How do the female head-teachers experience professional workload?
- b. How does professional workload of the female head-teachers cause parental stress?

Delimitations

- The participants of the study were only those head-teachers who are mothers of children age ranges from 1 month to 12 years and currently working in Elementary schools of Tehsil Jaranwala District Faisalabad.
- The head-teachers who are mothers and living in joint family system and those who are living in nuclear family system both were included in this study.

Methodology

The current study was conducted according to following methodology,

Approach

The current study used qualitative approach to uncover the experiences of mother head-teachers about the stress they feel when they neglect their children for work and how they manage their parental and professional life. Qualitative research was quite helpful to unpack the phenomenon of parental stress because it reveals the meaning of phenomena in accordance with the experiences of individuals (Kıral B., 2021).

Design

The phenomenon of parental stress which imbalance parental and professional responsibilities was uncovered through understanding the lived experiences of head-teachers who were mothers of children from age 1 month to twelve years. The strategies to manage parental stress were also explored with their experiences. As mentioned by Van Manen (1990) the phenomenology study reveals the meanings of experiences of individuals. So, to describe and understand phenomenon with the experiences of head-teachers phenomenology design is necessary to focus on true experiences (Lune and Berg, 2017).

Context / Setting

The research was conducted with the elementary school head-teachers who were working in high schools where classes from kachi to 8th are conducted. The reason behind choosing head-teachers of elementary school was apparently insightful. Elementary school head-teachers have to manage not only curricular and co-curricular activities as well as departmental responsibilities of increasing enrollment and retention, minimizing drop out, cleanliness, dengue SOPs, management of records, NSB, FTF, free text books delivery to all students and keeping record, managing teacher time table, class time table and

replacement time table in case a teacher is on leave, managing shortage of staff and management of security issues, and building maintenance etc. are some to count. No clerical staff is provided to head-teachers of elementary schools. They have to do clerical work themselves. In spite of all these responsibilities, the head-teachers have to attend meetings with Chief Executive Officers and District Education Officers after school hours whenever calls. They are bound to attend schools during summer vacations too. The responsibilities of head teachers increase when they have to balance workload and family life.

Participants

The research participants were working as the headmistress in public elementary schools of Jaranwala during academic year of 2023. All participants were selected through purposive sampling method. The reason to use purposive sampling is that the sample selected for study have experienced the concepts which researcher needs to investigate (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The total participants were eight head-teachers having children between age 1 month to 12 years. Three out of eight head teachers were working in Elementary schools in urban area while other five were working in the Elementary schools located in rural area. The headmistresses who are living in joint family system and those who are living in nuclear system, both were selected to understand their experiences. Four participants were living in joint family system while other four were living in nuclear family system. The Participants were contacted via phone call and appointments were made according to their suitable time and day. Researcher visited their schools and meet the participants in their office.

Instrument

In qualitative research interview is the most powerful technique of data collection to reveal the interests, views of participants, attitude, and behavior of actors. It is used to obtain an inner view of things which cannot be seen from outside (Rossetto, 2014). Therefore, semi structured interview was developed with open-ended questions to understand the phenomenon of parental stress perceived by working mothers. Pilot interview was conducted with the two participant to refine interview questions. Final form of the interview was furnished under guidance of the expert. The participants were interviewed at their workplaces at their purposed day and time. They were informed of audio recording of interview. Notes were also taken during interview when required.

Data collection and Analysis

Informed consents were taken from all participants to fulfill ethical considerations. Semi structured interview form was developed and discussed with experts to ensure content validity and face validity. The interview form embodies objectives of the research and comprised of nine question. An example of questions in interview form is “Describe your professional responsibilities”? “Are you satisfied with your role as working mother”? “How you feel when you have to neglect your child due to workload”? “What behavior your children show when you have to pay less attention towards your child”? “Describe your feelings about emotional development of your children”. As the participants of the study are head-teachers of elementary schools of tehsil Jaranwala so they were engaged on their workplaces. Appointments were made according to their ease, on their proposed schedule. Participants were informed about the recording of the interview; besides this, written notes were also taken.

Before data analysis the interviews made with the elementary head-teachers were translated into English language and then transcribed in Microsoft Word file. As Urdu is native language of Pakistan the participants shared their experiences in Urdu. We listened recorded interviews and then transcribe in English for thematic analysis.

Translation is required in qualitative studies if the target publication language is different from data source language. Every participant interview was saved in separate file. To ensure the confidentiality of data participants were assigned participant numbers.

After that, we performed data analysis process. The transcribed text files were then imported to NVivo QSR version 14 for manual coding and data categorization. NVivo is Computer-Assisted Qualitative data analysis software recommended for analysis of interviews in phenomenology studies (Sohn, 2017).

Results and Interpretation

After coding on the basis of lived experiences of elementary head-teachers, themes were extracted and analyzed for the detailed analysis. Finally, three themes, *workload experiences*, *Stressors*, and *coping strategy*.

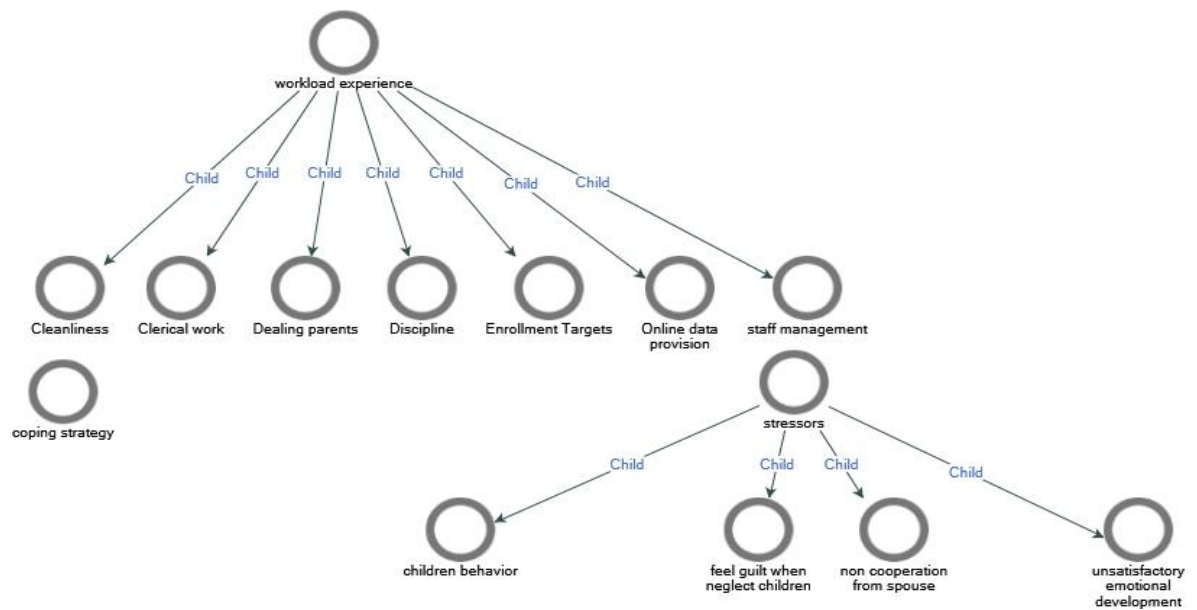


Figure 1 : Project Map

Theme1: Workload experiences

First theme provides understanding of workload which is derived from eight sub-themes. The participants shared their experiences regarding their duties. They have to manage school cleanliness, discipline, leave management of staff. If any staff member is on leave the head-teachers are responsible to manage periods of that teacher with management of leave record. Enrollment targets are set by higher authorities and head-teachers are responsible for increase in enrollment ratio and maintenance of baseline enrollment with minimum drop out. They also manage school record, prepare NSB and FTF record, manage cash book and prepare monthly action plan, meetings with parents and with school council members, stock register maintenance , reply school emails and are responsible for dengue activity submission on daily basis. With all

these responsibilities the head-teachers have to take classes and teach students. In some elementary schools, where staff is short, the head-teachers have to teach more than two periods.



Figure 2: theme 1

The participants who bring their children with them at workplace feel more burden while completing their professional responsibilities as compared to those participants whose children are school going.

Theme 2: Stressors

Second theme stressor was derived from the experiences of participants. Participants shared their emotions and feelings as working mothers. Participants have to perform many duties as head-teachers. Many participants felt stress due to many factors related to their motherhood and their job.

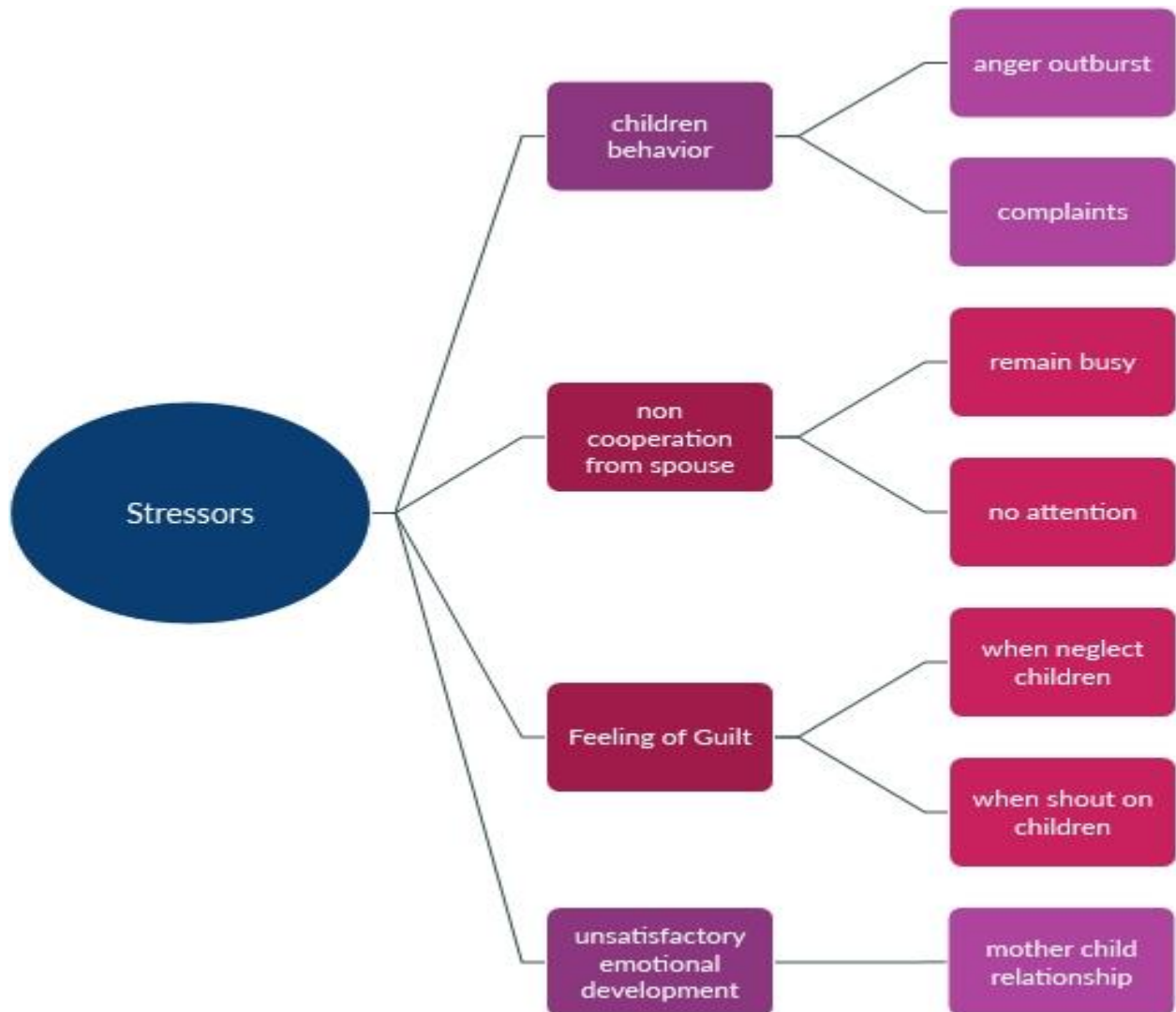


Figure 2: Theme 2

These factors include their children behavior , feeling of guilt and stress when they neglect them for work , unsatisfactory emotional development and non cooperation form family and spouse.

Children behavior

Participants felt the change in children behavior when they neglect their children for work.

“My daughter which is three years old, shows anger and start beating me whenever I return home from school I wish I could be a staying home mother.” (Participant 1)

“My children got angry and complaint that you remain busy and don’t give us time like other mothers do.....” (Participant 3)

This sub-theme explained the feelings of participants when they feel change in the behavior of their children due to their role as working mother. Separation of child from mother due to her working role effect mother and children (Almani et al., 2012).

Feeling of Guilt

What is your feeling when you have to neglect your child due to workload? The participants felt pressurized and stretched.

"I feel very bad and stretched Stressed and angry.... When I shout on children and ignore them...."(Participant 5)

If the relationship between mother and children effects the mothers encompass feeling of hopelessness, anxiety, loss of pleasure and sadness (Kennedy, 2008).

Unsatisfactory Emotional Development of Children

Mothers were worried about their children emotional development. According to them if they were staying at home mothers they could better work on emotional development of their children.

"when I remain busy in office work even if I am at home or at school I give mobile to my son and he used to watch cartoons on it. Sometimes it is very disturbing that the time during which my child would be busy with me or play with me he is busy on mobile and shows no association with me when I take mobile off from him". (Participant 6)

"I feel difference in brought up of my children as compared to other children my kids are sensitive and argumentative".(Participant 2)

Mothers' work directly effect the development of child as the caregiver is not a substitute of mother. Children well being and their performance also effects in absence of parental supervision (Heinrich, 2014).

No-cooperation from spouse

Cooperation is very much important for working women either from spouse or from family members. Participants felt non-cooperative behavior of spouse puts more stress and burden in completion of daily chores.

"if husband is cooperative then everything is possible...". (participant 4)

"My husband remains busy but even if he is staying home he doesn't cooperate..." (Participant 8)

Theme 3: Parental Stress Coping Strategy

Participants have no strategy to cope with parental stress. One participant said she start weeping when she is in stress and this is her strategy. The other participant said she remain silent and don't like to talk anyone. One confess she start beating her children when she get stressed. While one participant shared that her husband is cooperative and with the cooperation of family and husband she manages all things timely without hassle.

Discussion and Conclusion

Thematic analysis performed in this study helped to explore lived experiences of mother head-teachers of elementary schools of Faisalabad. The participants of the study shared their working responsibilities as head-teachers of elementary schools. They were doing lots of chores from teaching to management of elementary schools. Being a working mother they experienced parental stress when they neglect their children due to workload. Due to mother's workload, the infants attachment suffers, which effects their emotional development. Gradually Children detach from mothers and their behavior toward mothers, ignorance, enhances stress and mothers feel guilt. The working mother cannot be equal the mother who is staying with her child twenty-four hours (Francavilla and Claudia, 2010). When the work is over, the working mothers should spent whole time with their children (Almani et. al., 2012) but due to non-cooperation from spouse, the mothers get overburden. Furthermore, the non-cooperation from spouse was reported equally by the head-teachers who are living in nuclear and joint family systems. No coping strategy was adopted by female head-teachers to overcome parental stress.

This study only interviewed the head-teachers of elementary schools of tehsil Jaranwala. Similar research can be carried out with working mothers of other departments. The working mothers can be supported to overcome their parental stress. Further research study with intervention to cope with parental stress may be conducted. Intervention in parental stress will safeguard wellbeing of parents. Seminars and support programs can be conducted on local level to reduce parental stress and foster healthy work life and family life.

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