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## **The Challenges of Women Leaders of Business Organizations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in Balancing Work-Family Responsibilities**

By Bruktawit Bahiru<sup>1</sup> and Abeba Beyene Mengistu<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Women's leadership significantly contributes to building high-performing organizations. However, challenges with balancing work and family responsibilities are inhibiting them from exerting their fullest potential towards this end. This study aims at investigating the challenges women leaders in Addis Ababa face in balancing the demands of their organizations with that of their families. A sample of eight women leaders of positions from large and middle scale organizations were taken using a purposive sampling technique. In-depth interviews were used to gather information for the study, and a phenomenological qualitative study was applied to analyze the data. The study identified some organizational, societal, and individual factors that challenge women leaders in balancing their work and family responsibilities. Work overload, cultural and social norms, family responsibilities, and upbringing related behaviors of the interviewees themselves were among the major challenges in maintaining their work-family balance. This study contributes insights into work-family balance theory and practice, by presenting women leaders' voices about their work-life challenges as expressed in their own words, from their own testimonies. It indicates that much needs to be done on the part of organizations, society, family, and women themselves for women leaders to have the desired level of work-family balance.

*Keywords:* work-family balance, women business leaders, phenomenological study, Ethiopia, Women business leaders

### **Brief Country Profile**

Ethiopia, an ancient society, is located in the Northeastern part of Africa. The country covers approximately 1.14 million square kilometers (CSA, 2015). Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia and the diplomatic city of Africa. The total population as of July 2017 was 94,352,000 with 47,365,000 (50.2%) males and 46,987,000 (49.8%) females (CSA, 2017). Ethiopia has nine regional administrations and two city regions. According to CSA (2013) national statistics report, out of the total 42,403,879 employees, 19,517,232 (46%) were women. Women held 61,302

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(26.5%) of the total 231, 211 managerial positions in the country, and the percentage of female Chief Executives, Senior Officials, and Legislators was 6,569 (14.6%) of the total 44,876 (Beyene, 2015). The percentage of women rises, as status in positions decline (Tadesse, 2017).

## **Introduction**

Work and family are important aspects of adult lives (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Zhang & Liu, 2011). Work-family balance is a wide-ranging concept that is defined in various ways by various researchers. The term work-life balance was first coined in the United States, in 1986 (Lockwood, 2003). Subsequently, the concept gained global significance from businesses, agencies, government, academics, practitioners, and the media (Harris & Foster, 2008). Attention to work-family balance became relevant in the early nineties with the rise of work demand, involvement of women in paid work, and with the change of contemporary organizational culture which dramatically affected the leisure sphere (Christa & Elena, 2015).

During and following the post-World War II period, the number of women participating in the workforce increased (Dickerson (2004:338). This change led to many challenges. Stress at home and in the lives of women increased as they attempted to balance their responsibilities in their homes and careers (Harris & Foster, 2008; Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). The problems and complications that sprang from this shift stirred conversations around gender roles in corporations, researchers, and lawmakers regarding work-life balance.

Work-family balance in the African context is a major problem that confines women in employment rather than men because women usually combine paid work activities with their domestic duties, including childcare (Okonkwo, 2012). As with their counterparts around the globe, women in Ethiopia play critical roles in the socio-economic growth of the country (UN Women, Nov. 2014). Likewise, the participation of Ethiopian women in paid work has been increasing, and this has brought unintended consequences in discharging their work and family demands in a reasonably balanced manner (Mengistu, 2012).

Ethiopian women's leadership positions have been increasing as well, as a result of their involvement in formal education. Okumo and Asfaw (2014:102), state, "Introduction and adoption of gender quotas in the political and public service offices do increase female leadership in both political and executive/public offices." For example, women's representation in the House of People's Representatives in Ethiopia grew from 2.83 percent in 1995 to 7.7 percent in 2000 to 21.4 percent in 2005 to 27.9 percent in 2010 (UN Women, Nov. 2014) and to 39 percent in 2016 (World Bank Group, 2016) and the increase in the number of women and their participation in leadership and governance was found out to yield significant results (UN Women, Nov. 2014).

Although their numbers may not be comparable with men, there are prominent women in Ethiopia who successfully lead business organizations and other sectors of the economy (Mengistu & Lituchy, 2017). Although actualizing their full potential is an opportunity, it is quite tough to be a leader for women in developing countries such as Ethiopia where the culture forces women to spend more time and effort on the household chores, family, community participation, and other social responsibilities. As a result, getting to leadership positions is something that cannot be easily attained by many. Cherinet and Mulugeta (2013) argue that the patriarchal culture of Ethiopia has impeded women's autonomy in all areas of life and resulted in keeping women's status low. The authors stated that patriarchal society keeps women subordinate to men and uses culture and religion as an excuse. This results in inequalities between men and women in divisions of labor, benefit shares, and the household responsibilities. But with education opportunities,

industrialization; the fast developing economy and knowledge, the opportunities of employment for women have also increased. In addition, Ogota (2013) argues that although a number of policies that support and encourage women's participation in development have been emerging, women's access to and control of productive resources, information, training, education, employment, and decision-making are limited.

In order to find out the challenges of women business organization leaders in balancing their work and family responsibilities, this article addresses the following questions: Do women leading business organizations in Addis Ababa have a balanced work-family life? What are the challenges they face? What must be done to ease the work-family balance tension of women leaders in business organizations in Ethiopia?

This paper has both theoretical and empirical contributions to the overall work-family/life balance literature. This study's contribution is critical because it presents women leaders' voices about their work-life challenges, expressed in their own words from their own testimonies. The findings obtained from a contextually different socio-cultural and economic environment than exists in the literature, may be of interest to several work-family/life balance researchers as it widens their level of understanding.

## **Review of Related Literature**

Work-life balance, according to Clark (2000:751) refers to good performance and satisfaction at work and home with the lowest amount of conflict. Greenbatt (2002) also defines it as the nonexistence of intolerable levels of clashes between non-work and work demands. The importance of managing work-life balance has increased markedly (De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004) as it is difficult to separate work and life as the distinction is rather blurred. However, work-life balance generally can be defined as achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains which requires exerting commitment, energy, and time (Kirchmeyer, 2000).

## **Work Life Balance Theories**

Work-life balance researches have been growing over the past decades. In the process of defining and finding challenges and strategies of work-family balance, many work-life balance theories have developed, some of which are discussed below.

### *Border theory*

This theory addresses the role a person takes within an explicit domain of life. The theory puts the subject of boundary management at the center of work-life balance. The theory has three types of boundaries: Physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries between domains of work and non-work. This theory deals with the subject of crossing the border between domains of life, particularly the domains of work and home. This theory states that the permeability and flexibility of boundaries between people's family and work lives will have an effect on the level of conflict, integration, and transition among these domains (Barling, Kelloway & Froneed, 2005).

### *Spillover*

This theory states that what one experiences in one dominion influences the practice in the other dominion. According to this theory, one might bring home-related responsibilities and emotions to work or vice versa. There could be a transfer of values, skill, experiences, and

behaviors between domains; and the outcome resulting from spill-over can either be positive or negative (Kanter, 1977; Pleck, 1977; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

#### *Enhancement Approach*

This approach suggests that multiple roles can in fact generate positive outcomes. This approach assumes that the reward from multiple roles might surpass the burden. As a result, employees who are involved in several roles could profit from privileges, position security, status improvement, fortification of personality, and ego satisfaction (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

#### *Scarcity Approach*

According to this theory people have only a limited amount of energy, time and attention (Goode, 1960). Therefore, being involved in numerous roles can rapidly reduce a person's resources if they are not used properly. This theory suggests people with many roles are prone to drain their resources which results in role conflict and role overload (Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Barnett & Gareis, 2006).

#### *Gender Organization System (GOS)*

This is a perspective that recognizes the coincident interaction among the person, the organization, and the society. It suggests that the challenge of working women arises from both their gender and their organization structure (Fagenson, 1990).

The arguments made in this paper are based on the tenets of the gender organization system and scarcity approach.

### **Contribution of Women Leadership to Building High-Performing Organizations**

Women's leadership contributes towards creating high performing organizations. For example, women leaders were found out to be more transformational (Bass, 1999), and the contribution of this leadership to higher organizational performance is well researched. Orser (2000) stated that women managers encompass a deep pool of skills and knowledge that is underrepresented in the senior levels of management in most industry sectors and calls for the involvement of more women. The author argued that diverse executive teams function more effectively by responding to problems and opportunities in more creative ways. This indicates an organization's performance will be higher when women are in leadership positions with their male counterparts than when men are leading alone. Similarly, a study by McKinsey & Company (2008) offered the insight that women leaders possess behaviors that are critical to addressing upcoming organizational challenges and provide a real competitive advantage to organizations. In addition, a meta-analysis conducted by Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014:1129) quantitatively summarized gender differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness across 99 independent samples from 95 studies. The researchers came up with results that show, "When all leadership contexts are considered, men and women do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness. Yet, when other ratings only are examined, women are rated as significantly more effective than men."

### **Work-Family Balance Challenges of Women Leaders**

In most parts of the globe, women's roles have evolved dramatically with equal opportunity legislation, affirmative action principles, women's movements, and feminist thought. Women's

participation in the formal sector of African economies has also generally increased during the past two decades, whereas structural adjustment policies as part of globalization, have posed serious challenges for women's economic and educational achievement (Christian & Minjeong, 2009).

Several authors have mentioned the multiple responsibilities women have in their societies. For example, Alan (2014) stated that women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth and human development. As the number of women increases in the workforce and in leadership roles, it is important to have the models to understand the intersection of gender and leadership (Jean, 2007). This research has reviewed organizational, societal, and individual factors that affect the work-family balance of women leaders using the gender organization system framework and the scarcity approach to work-family balance.

### **Organizational Factors**

Researchers have identified work-arrangements, job stress, technology, and role ambiguity as possible organizational factors that affect the work-family balance of employees in general but can have more impact on women (Shobitha & Sudarsan, 2014).

As far as work arrangements are concerned, many studies have suggested that flexible work arrangements assist employees to have a better mix between work and non-work activities and help the organizations to employ, keep and inspire their employees. Having difficult work arrangements like long working hours and poor working conditions, can lead to work-life imbalance (Shobitha & Sudarsan, 2014).

Job stress is a condition in which an individual perceives her work environment as demanding and threatening and therefore feels distress in the work place (Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra & Ironson, 2001). Job stress affects the work-life balance of employees.

Technological developments have made the working environment more flexible and accessible at all times. Depending on the case, technological advancement can both facilitate and hinder work-life balance (Waller & Ragsdell, 2015).

Role ambiguity happens when one is not clear about the expectation of the role he or she is assigned to. Vanniarajan and Jayanthi (2012) investigated the impact of role ambiguity on work-life balance, and they found that role pressure that comes from role ambiguity has a significant influence upon work-life balance and that it is higher amongst female executives than males. Similar to their counterparts in the rest of the world, women in Ethiopia have been moving towards previously male dominated positions, though men have been rarely moving to women's domestic work (Mengistu, 2012; Mengistu, Hoobler & Tadesse, 2015).

### **Societal Factors**

Societal factors include: family responsibilities, childcare and eldercare responsibilities, and other social responsibilities such as visiting relatives, attending weddings and funeral ceremonies, and asking the sick.

Nowadays, quite a large number of women spend their time outside of their home in response to the new employment opportunities and increasing financial pressures to fulfill family demands. However, the number of men in sharing the responsibilities of unpaid work in the home has rarely increased. A study by Curphy, Ginnett, and Hughes (2009) shows that in addition to

their roles in their companies, women remain the chief caretakers for their families, and this causes time constraints in all activities. Usually, promotion forces many women to choose between career and family because both sides are demanding. Consequently, very few women CEOs and executives have children out of fear of the impact it would have on their careers (Eagly, 2007).

Women are expected to be involved more than men in several social responsibilities regardless of the position they assume in organizations. For example, in Ethiopia, societal expectations demand that women are more involved in social affairs such as attending weddings and funerals, as well as other indigenous social networks like 'Eder', 'Eqube'. According to Girma (2012),

*'Eder' is a religiously and politically neutral institution. It is an indigenous "safety net" system or even an insurance system where families facing crisis, especial the loss of a loved one, can seek immediate help. The contribution includes material, financial as well as psychological support.*

*'Eqube' is a financial institution. It is an informal credit facility and works as follows: a group of people collect a certain amount of money together and lend it to a person who is in an immediate need for the purchase of a house, a plot of land, furniture and so on. This lending is not done on a humanitarian basis. It is done on the contractual basis, where the lender who receives the money will pay back the money in several installments.*

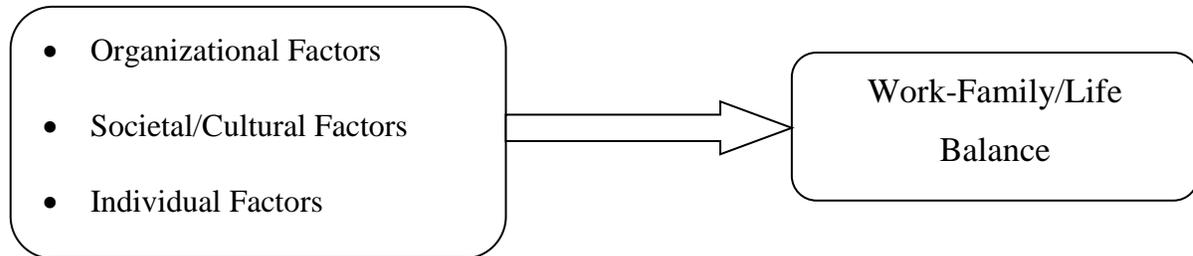
Involvement in such activities is regarded as one of the major challenges for women in leadership positions. This makes the balance of work-family responsibility challenging for women because when they try to conform to their gender role, it could produce failure to meet the requirements of the leader role and when they attempt to conform to their leadership role they may fail at their gender role (Girma, 2012).

### **Individual Factors**

Individual factors include the personality and psychological well-being that influence the level of an individual's ability to balance work and family demands. It includes a blend of factors—genetic, and socialization/enculturation, that play into gender roles. For example, childhood upbringing is one of the factors that determines an individual's personality. Burdens that arise from household areas and work chores can influence behaviors and change the personality of individuals and how they perform and work together with others, both in and outside their environments (Shobitha & Sudarsan, 2014). Psychological well-being pertains to positive psychological characteristics such as satisfaction, self-acceptance, optimism, or hope. Gropel (2009) perceived that there is a positive relationship between well-being and work-life balance. That is, if employees have self-esteem, and satisfaction, it contributes towards lower tension and conflict in work-family balance.

### Conceptual Framework

We propose that work-family balance of Ethiopian women leaders of business organizations is affected by three factors: Organizational, societal/cultural, and individual factors. This proposition is diagrammatically represented as follows:



### Methodology

The purpose of this research is to assess the factors that challenge women leaders of business organizations in balancing their work and family responsibilities in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The research design selected to achieve this objective is a qualitative phenomenological research design. Qualitative research captures the how and what of the collective experience (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative phenomenology research design is believed to be best suited for identifying and capturing the participants' lived stories and understanding their shared experiences (Maypole & Davies, 2001).

Data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary data was used from published journal articles for reviewing the existing literature. The main data collection technique was an in-depth semi-structured interview with women in leadership positions. They were individually approached and appointment was secured. A total of eight willing women leaders from different business organizations were interviewed as per the interview guide that took at least an hour and were audio recorded. The position of the interviewees ranged from Chief Executive Officer to General Manager. Seven of the participants were married and they had children. Five (62.5 %) of the participants were BA Degree holders, and three (37.5%) had Master's Degree with a work experience between 10 to 40 years.

The women were intentionally selected from large and medium-sized organizations because the work-family challenge is believed to be higher as the size of the organization they lead and the positions assumed are higher. The companies they represented were Ethiopian Airlines, Ethio Telecom, Nib International Bank, Abay Bank, Lion International Bank, Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Association, and Joshua Credit and Savings Association.

The interview questions included general demographic and work-family balance related items. Sample items include, "What organizational factors do you think have an effect on work-family balance of women leaders?", "Does your work keep you longer than the normal working hours?", "Do you miss out on quality time with your family and friends because of demands of work?", "Do you get any help from family or anyone else for your responsibilities at home? How much does it help you in balancing your work and family?", "Can you mention some of the societal expectation and cultures that put pressure on women like yourself? How does it make you feel when you are not able to meet those expectations?", "Do you ever feel like you have to prove yourself to your company or family that you can do it all?", "Do you perceive any gender stereotype in you work area? If yes, does it make getting things done harder and complicated for

you compared to men leaders at the same position as you are? What is your reaction to it?”, “Do you feel like you are in a demanding position both in your organization and personal life? If so, what coping mechanisms do you usually use to create equilibrium between the two spheres of life?”

Data collection was terminated at the point of saturation, where the researcher was not able to get new information by adding more respondents. Their responses were analyzed using the seven steps of phenomenological study: Horizontalization, phenomenological reduction and elimination, clustering of units of meanings to form themes, validation, textural description, structural description, and synthesis of meanings and essences (Creswell, 2009).

### **Findings on Organizational Factors**

Organizational factors that challenge the women leaders in balancing their work and family responsibilities are:

#### *Work Overload*

All participants stated they were experiencing work overload. The main reasons for the work overload was their inability to say no, the nature of their company and their work, the amount of trust and responsibility the company bestowed in them, and the imbalance of their responsibility and their working hour.

The volume of workload that Participant 2 had in her organization was raised as the cause of leaving with insufficient time and commitment for their family life:

*My family is not happy with my work load and schedule because my responsibility demands me to work late in the evening, work on weekends, on holidays and even when I am at home after I am back from work. My husband tells me to lessen the time I spend on office work many times. But, I couldn't! These days it is only my dogs who gladly welcome me home.*

The respondent's statement indicates the challenge she had been facing due to the workload she had associated with her leadership position. This respondent seems to lack the personal social support from her family members to the work overload she had. Women leaders need both emotional and instrumental social support to be successful in their leadership positions. According to Wayne, Randel, and Stevens (2006), instrumental support refers to behaviors and attitudes of family members aimed at assisting day-to-day household activities, and such support allows the women leaders to focus their time and preserve their energy for work. Emotional support refers to the expression of feelings to enhance others' affect or behavior (Erickson, 1993), and such support positively contributes to discharge responsibilities in the work domain (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006). Lack of such family support, however, will have counterproductive effects on their leadership behavior and may lead to family-work conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

The lived experiences of Participant 1 and Participant 5, showed how a woman's decision to succeed in one dimension of life affects the other:

*I know I would have been successful if I continued my education, and I really want to earn my Master's and PhD, if possible. I waited too long to do it. I got married and had kids so it became very difficult for me. And now with this work I*

*only have a little time to my family, and it seemed so selfish of me to even think of upgrading my education at this time.* (Participant 1)

*Because of my focus on my career and upgrading myself, I did not get married until now. If I was married, I could have found a partner who would help me in my life or maybe more responsibilities would have been added up in my life. I never know.* (Participant 5)

Though the work overload of the women leaders is there, one of them could not progress in her education because she had a family, while the other progressed in her career but compromised her opportunity to get married. These life experiences indicate the level of difficulty of women leaders in balancing their work-family demands.

#### *Negative Work-Family Organizational Culture*

According to Thompson, Beauvais, and Lynes (1999), a positive work-family organizational culture exists when there are shared beliefs, assumptions, and values between an organization and its employees demonstrated by supporting employees' family and work lives. However, the study participants indicated that working extra hours each day including weekends and holidays, was regarded as a normal part of the job routine for people in leadership positions in their organizations. In relation to this, Participant 6 stated:

*Meetings are mostly scheduled after working hours. This is a great challenge especially for women. Women value the time we have after work as we have a lot to do at home. Unlike men, we have the primary responsibility of watching over our family needs especially with making sure they are having proper meals and hygiene. There are occasions whereby we don't have housemaids to assist us with such responsibilities, and at that time managing both responsibilities gets tougher.*

The above statement may indicate that organizations do not consider the family and social responsibilities women leaders are expected to discharge after working hours. Although some variations may exist among cultures, it is understood that women are the primary role players in discharging domestic and childcare responsibilities (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011), and this holds true in the Ethiopian context.

#### *Gender Stereotypes*

Almost all respondents (seven out of eight) mentioned gender stereotypes as one organizational challenge women leaders faced in balancing their work and family demands. The ideas shared by Participant 2 and Participant 5 summarize what had been said by the rest:

*There is a gender stereotype about the capability of women leaders when compared to that of men's. This makes my work harder and complicated. Such stereotype even changed my behavior and how I interact with people. Especially when you have men working under you, it is really difficult as many do not accept your leadership. This is true even for those who are above me as they do not believe the work they give me will be well handled by me as that of men leaders.*

*So, I have to work further and harder to make my competencies more visible, and this takes much of my family's time. (Participant 2)*

Similarly, Participant 5 stated:

*Women are not heard. Even when we have a better idea than a man they are not willing to hear us. However, after a while when any man suggests that same idea which we had already suggested earlier but which was denied implementation, will be attributed to him, assuming he came up with a noble idea.*

This stereotype of viewing women's idea as less important and not accepting their orders and guidelines can be one of the major reasons for making them work more to influence the behavior of their subordinates and superiors. This usually takes extra effort and time which gets in the way of their family's resources.

Linehan and Scullion (2008) argue that gender stereotypes in the workplace instigate from the traditional paradigms of categorizing female roles as a mother and wife and identifying males as breadwinners. Since gender role stereotypes devalue the achievements of women, they create psychological barriers which limit the number of female leaders and affect their performance (Oswald, 2008). However, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014) have stated, those stereotypes that associate leadership effectiveness with masculinity are likely to dissolve slowly over time as more and more women enter and succeed in their leadership positions.

#### *Inadequate Family Friendly Organizational Initiatives*

Most of the participant (six out of eight) stated that there is no particular policy that specifically targets and clearly specifies work-family balance issues of employees in general and women in particular, except for the common leaves like annual leave, maternity and mourning leave, etc. The respondents were of the idea that the focus of their organizations was on getting the job done no matter how. Participant 7 stated that, "*The organization only focuses on the job that needs to be done. They do not care if our life is balanced or not; they just want to see the work is done on time. They don't even want to hear any excuse.*" The reason for no attention on work-family balance was addressed by Respondent 6 as follows:

*Going the extra mile in order to achieve greatness is becoming a culture in every organization, without being considerate to family needs. Thus, we impose a lot of work overload on ourselves, and we also require it from employees under us. However, if we want to create work-life balance, we should stop requiring so much.*

This may show that employees were left alone to struggle to balance work and family demands on their own as work-family balance had not yet been an issue of priority in their organizations.

Participants suggested that the first thing organizations need to do is to believe in the importance of work-life balance. For instance participant 2 stated,

*The first step is to believe in the concept of work-family/life balance and the advantages they will get from having an employee with balanced life. It is only*

*after organizations appreciate the significance of work-family balance that we can begin thinking and discussing the subsequent solutions. The big gap, I think, is the fact that most organizations do not give any place for family/life issues.*

However, 2 (25%) of the participants said there was a good start at their company and shared some practices that could be considered as a good start. Participant 2 said the organization in which she worked had delegated one office with full equipment for women employees to pump their breast. In addition, Participant 4 stated that she was allowed to carry her baby and a baby sitter to the office by the director of the boards when she gave birth to her last baby and asserted this was a great help. Organizations that care about their employees' well-being implement policies and programs that enhance work-life balance (McCarthy, Cleveland, Hunter, Darcy, & Grady, 2013).

### **Findings on Societal Factors**

The societal factors that challenged the work-family balance as identified from the respondents are stated below:

#### *Social and Community Responsibilities*

Seven (87.5%) of the respondents said they were responsible for fulfilling the needs of their families such as purchasing groceries and related materials to keep up their family's necessities and demands; taking care of extended families and involvement in social affairs and associations. However, Participant 2 stated she could not make it due to the high work demand from her organization.

*I don't get involved in any social activities or do anything else other than my work. My work by itself is very demanding, and all I need to do when I go home is get some rest. I live with my husband. My children are not with me. So I don't have that much demanding responsibility in my home. My social life is out of the picture in my life.*

Though the life style of Participant 2 is different from the rest, most of them try to do it regardless of the burden they have at work because they don't want to be out of the social norm.

#### *Little Assistance from Family*

Most of the respondents (six out of seven) said that they had great assistance from their spouses, and witnessed it was of great help for their professional success. The help they received related to looking after the kids contributed in balancing their work and family demands.

For example, Participant 1 said, "*The help I get from my husband is a basis for my achievement. Without his support, there is no way I could have been here.*" Similarly, Participant 3 said,

*I could not be where I am today if it weren't for the help of my husband. I have achieved what I needed but all the credit and prize should go to my husband. He has passed through some frustrating times, but he is still supporting me. So I am so thankful for him.*

Participant 8 also said, “*My husband may not go to the kitchen to prepare food or wash dishes’ but handling everything the children require from me has been of great help.*”

The above transcribed statements of the interviewees witness that spouses play a great role in creating balance between work and family responsibilities of women leaders. Without the help of husbands, women leaders with families cannot be effective.

One of the participants, however, shared a different experience about the low level of assistance she had from her family:

*My husband is a traditional husband and he doesn’t want to help me in the house chores or with the kids. I am studying for my master’s degree in the extension program, and he is not happy about it, too. And with all the responsibilities at work, home, and school it has been very difficult and it seems like I have to make a choice. The choices are not simple. I have considered resigning from work, but our family will be impacted financially in a great way. I have even considered divorce, but I found that is not the answer because it will be terrible for my kids’ upbringing. Now, I am confused about what I should do in my life. In order to fix this, I am seeing a psychiatrist hoping it will help me manage things at my office and at my home*

The experience of this respondent shows how difficult it is for a woman to succeed as a leader unless she has a good support from her family members in general and her husband in particular. According to Marcinkus, Shelan-Berry, and Gordon (2007), personal social support that may come from an employee’s spouse or other family members is found out to be positively associated with work-family balance.

#### *Pressure of Societal Expectations*

Participants stated the culture of expectation for women to be involved more in social gatherings like weddings, funeral ceremonies, etc. than men is an additional challenge to their work-life imbalance. At times when they could not do it, some participants confessed they blame themselves for not participating in such social events and ask themselves if their work is worth losing their social lives. Participant 5, for example, expressed the struggle and fear she had in meeting societal expectations as follows:

*They expect you to be there in the ‘Eders’ they have, they expect you to show up on weddings and funerals and visit the sick in the village. Well, I am not doing any of that. I only, once in a while go to funerals if I get the chance. I feel sorry for not being involved in the social life. But what can I do? It is the nature of my work! Now, they have left me and I have left them, too! Nowadays, they don’t even bother to call and meet me or expect me to show up on their ceremonies. What I am afraid of is that, God willing, if I live longer and retire from work and want to continue the relationship I had with them, I don’t think they will forgive me and make the broken relationship work again.*

Participant 4 states that most of her friends and relatives do not really believe that she was that busy not to have time for them. As a result, they are not willing to understand her situation at

all. She mentioned the usual blames from her family members and friends as, “*My family and friends sometimes say, ok maybe you can’t come and visit us, but how come you cannot even answer our call? And it is really hard to explain for everyone the nature of the work.*”

These testimonies demonstrate the pressure women feel comes from longstanding cultural expectations. The culture made it difficult for the participants to make people understand the nature of their work. Trying to meet the societal expectations added a great burden and contributed to the imbalance that already exists in their lives.

### **Findings of Individual Factors**

Participants were asked to state individual factors that affected their work-life balance. The main concepts derived from their responses are presented below.

#### *Behavior and Style of Communication*

Participants expressed that their childhood upbringing and social constructs influenced their behavior and development. For example, their inability to say ‘no’ and their too much obedience to their superiors had brought them extra burdens which impacted their work-family balance.

Statements of Participants 5 and 2 can be taken as examples of how their upbringing as women affected their behavior and added a challenge in their attempt to balance their work-family responsibilities.

*Starting from childhood upbringing, women are not allowed to express their feelings or talk back to their families. I remember I used to be punished for the faults of my brother because I was raised not to explain myself or talk back to my family (Participant 5).*

*I was brought up in a way that I could not show my feelings and talk about what I want. So ‘Yilugnta’ [an Amharic word /one of the local languages in Ethiopia/ to indicate a feeling of shame by worrying what other people may say] has been impacting me a lot in my work. I say ok to every responsibility they give me and try to do it stretching myself more than I can do. Due to this behavior I have been under stress. As a result, I lost my health and am now a hypertension patient. (Participant 2)*

From the above respondents, the inability to communicate well and express their feelings or the inability to develop assertive behavior is found out to be one of the factors that influenced their work-family balance. Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002) also found that several of these individual factors were significant including assertiveness with work-family conflict.

#### *Perception of Responsibilities*

Women feel responsible for the well-being of their family more than men and they strive to adjust their home and work schedules to accommodate all. Women have a feeling that if they do not surrender themselves for their family and children, no one else will (Sangita, 2014). This indicates that women feel that are more obligated to fulfill the responsibilities at their house and for their children than men, and this conception adds much stress on them and affects their work-

family balance. It should be noted that their feelings are supported by the facts that men are not contributing equally in the household.

The women in the current study perceive themselves as the responsible person for their work, family matters, and social commitments. They stated that their lives are full of responsibilities at work because they are involved in managing, business trips, packed meeting schedules on top of dealing with their day-to-day monotonous responsibilities of home and life. And their perception of being responsible for every area of their lives more than men adds pressure and challenge in creating balance. Six (75%) of the participants said they feel like they have to be effective and efficient in all areas of their lives and exert extra effort on both their work and family responsibilities. The following respondents made the following statements:

*If I and my male colleague have the same presentation tomorrow, he might go home, eat what is made ready for him, and start to prepare for his presentation. But I cannot just go home, eat, and do the same because I have the responsibility to check my kitchen, do some necessary house chores, maybe feed my kids, spend some time with them, and then I will start working after. This makes me stay late up in the evening (Participant 6)*

*I know a man with the equal position of me. He doesn't have as many responsibilities at home as I do. However, I give no excuse for myself. I don't want my superiors to say we cannot count on you as well as a man. Therefore, the only choice I have is to work harder and be stronger. (Participant 8)*

This indicates that women leaders are not excused of family responsibilities whatever workload they have. Since this is the expectation, they exert extra effort to show that they can do it and be as effective as men, and prove that they are equipped with every leadership capability. Their families also have demands for them, and they are willing to put in the extra effort to fulfill that role too. So their mental pressure is high because they hold themselves more responsible at home and for their children, and want to prove themselves for both their family and company.

## **Conclusions**

This study sought to identify the organizational, societal, and individual factors challenging the work-family balance of the participants. The research showed that currently there is an extensive interest on work-family balance amongst business women leaders in Addis Ababa. The findings exhibited the existence of work-family balance challenges. The conflict, as the research revealed, is a daily struggle because these women leaders have more difficulty in maintaining and establishing balance between their several demanding work and family responsibilities.

One of the major organizational factors posing a challenge is the work overload. The work responsibilities the participants are given is not commensurate with the normal working hours the company provides. Companies seem to demand more outcomes than the resources they offer. The nature of the work by itself also does not allow the respondents to work during the normal working hours only. Negative organizational cultures like gender stereotypes and demanding extra hours exist in organizations, and this is putting more challenge on women leaders in their struggle of balancing work and family life. In addition, lack of awareness about what was meant by work-

family balance and the inadequate family friendly organizational initiatives are sources of negative influence in balancing work and family obligations for women leaders in Addis Ababa.

The influence of the social demands cannot be underestimated. As Ethiopians value social relationship to a high degree and the focus is more on women, their inability to meet such demands exerts much burden on the emotional well-being of women leaders and creates work-family imbalances. The responsibilities they have in both the work and family sphere plus the expectation from the society made the challenge of balancing their lives more difficult. However, getting proper personal social support—especially that of a supportive husband is key for the successes of women in leadership positions.

On the individual factors that influenced their leadership behavior, the respondents' family upbringing behavior still had a power to impact them negatively. The women leaders' low level of assertiveness had a negative role in the level of their work-family balance. The total alignment of most of the women leaders' mentality on accepting societal values and trying to satisfy every life requirement and appear competent in all domains of life was also one of the main causes of their work-family balance challenges.

The work-family balance challenges of women and the contributing organizational, societal, and individual factors have been inhibiting the contribution in building high performing organizations.

## **Recommendations**

If women are going to have a meaningful role contributing towards building high performing organizations, the following suggestions are forwarded to minimize the challenges women leaders are facing in balancing their work and family responsibilities. Minimizing the work-family balance challenges of women leaders need to be addressed by several stakeholders. This includes the government, hiring organizations, the society, family members, and the women themselves.

The government can play a significant role by creating societal and managerial awareness about the multiple challenges women in general and women leaders in particular have in Ethiopia. It can also assist by developing family-friendly policies, enforce their implementation, and follow up implementations by establishing a government body.

Ethiopian organizations should allow women leaders and employees to have a reasonable amount of workload that does not extend beyond normal working hours in significant ways. Women leaders should obtain recognition for their positive performance to reduce the effect of gender stereotypes. In addition, organizations should benchmark the experience of family-friendly local and international organizations, and aim to create an environment whereby they can be an employer of choice. Though some are providing different benefit packages, they have to identify how these benefits are assisting their women leaders in balancing their work-family balance barriers. Organizations should also provide work-family balance training to all their employees. This helps to create awareness about the necessity of sharing home responsibilities because men should not continue considering domestic labor as women's labor. Although the provision of paternity leave began few years ago in Ethiopia, much needs to be done to create a more conducive environment for women leaders and employees with regard to balancing their work and family demands. Men also should recognize the contributions of women in the workplace and give credit to their ideas rather than claiming them for their own. This is increasingly known as “unconscious bias” and should be highlighted in workplace trainings.

The society should understand the demanding nature of being a leader especially when it comes to women double burdened by domestic and social demands. A mechanism of awareness creation should be made especially by concerned institutions and the media to clarify the roles women leaders play in making effective organizations and in building the nation. The society should consider how busy a woman is when she leads an organization on top of all the culturally prescribed familial obligations. It should be aware of how hard it is and should look for a solution to share the burdens of women leaders and professionals.

Parents in particular should work on their children's awareness. Initially, they have to make their male and female children equally involved in discharging household responsibilities. Boys should be mentored to look at girls as equals and to take on household chores. In addition, parents should work in enhancing the self-image of their daughters starting from childhood. They have to also work on their sons to respect the capability of women as leaders.

Gender consciousness of men, women and the society needs to be changed for greater gender equality and for subsequent enhancement of the work-family balance of women. Gender roles are socially constructed and can be changed through awareness creation. Men should enhance their gender consciousness because the tasks of women in their homes to sustain the family have nothing to do with their sex and can be performed by men. As it was socially constructed when men were the only breadwinners, it has to be modified when women became breadwinners, too. Similarly, Ethiopian women should also improve their gender consciousness and should motivate their sons and husbands to participate in home chores. In order to bring this change a lot of work needs to be done starting from childhood. Families and schools should also take the responsibility of educating children about gender equality. Men who understand these burdens should encourage other men, taking on leadership roles in gender consciousness.

The husbands, children, relatives, and friends of women leaders should develop a special empathy to understand and support them in every way they can. Family members should take part in fulfilling the needs of the family. Although the strains women leaders have can only be lifted if society works together to reduce their burdens, women leaders should devise strategies, in tandem with government and families, to help them achieve their full potentials as effective leaders in their organizations, mothers, spouses and human beings.

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