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Identifying the Sources of Work-family Conflict among Women Entrepreneurs in Iran

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this paper is to identify the sources of work-family conflict among Iranian women entrepreneurs and bridge the academic gap in this area. In this regard, the paper tries to employ opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship theory. The qualitative approach was used by conducting 15 in-depth interviews with Iranian women entrepreneurs in the Semnan province. According to the results, Sources of work-family conflict for Iranian women entrepreneurs were categorized into: social, cultural, family, and personal categories. These sources are different from opportunity- and necessity-driven Iranian women entrepreneurs.

KEY WORDS: *work-family conflict, sources of work-family conflict, Iranian*

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Introduction

Entrepreneurial activities were dominated by men in the past. Until the late seventies, women did not occupy managerial or entrepreneurial positions. With changes that revolutionized the male-dominated workplace, women entered the market in developing countries (Agarwal & Garg, 2017). As a result, special attention has been paid to women entrepreneurs in many developing countries, such as Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc., who in turn have played a significant role in increasing national income, prosperity and improving the economic situation of these countries (Adrien et al., 1999).

The conditions under which Iranian women live can be one of the main causes that give rise to less reliable businesses compared to men. For example, if a man feels that his wife will soon become financially and emotionally independent as a result of establishing a business, this might affect their marital relationship. Today, it is fairly easy for a man to accept that his wife works outside the home, but owning a business is another matter. Money, independence, control, and many of the resulting challenges cause different obstacles and conflicts for women entrepreneurs (Ling & Kim, 2001). In fact, one of the issues that has surfaced with the increase in women's participation in entrepreneurship is increased conflict in work-family responsibilities as the most important challenge facing these women (Boz et al., 2015). Stressful conflicts between work and home may cause the individual to experience stress, which may affect their participation at work. This interference is usually known as an excessive negative feeling of one domain that is carried over to the other one. For example, the anxiety and burnout caused by playing a role in one area make it difficult to correctly play a role in another area. Work environment and home features can be major sources of conflict (Demerouti et al., 2007). Despite the expansion of women's entrepreneurial activities in recent years, entrepreneurship rates for women and the growth rate of businesses run by women are very low. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, the proportion of women entrepreneurs to men in Iran is 54 (Kelley et al., 2015). This indicates that entrepreneurial activities by Iranian women are almost half of their male counterparts. Business stabilization rate for women is 5% compared to men, which is 23% (Kelley et al., 2015). One of the causes of this is the institutional norms of the Iranian society because, like some societies, family responsibilities in Iran are generally borne by women, and men rarely take part in activities such as cooking or parenting. In addition to

causing worries and work-related stress, these tasks and roles can limit the time dedicated to a business (Modarresi et al., 2017). Despite the significance of the issue and the focus of previous studies (Arasti, 2006) on the identification of increasing conflict between the work and family of Iranian female entrepreneurs, the issue has been neglected so far. So, this research seeks to answer this question: what are the sources of work-family conflict among Iranian female entrepreneurs from the perspective of female entrepreneurs?

Work-family Conflict Sources in Women

Work-family conflict is one of the major challenges facing female entrepreneurs. Work-family conflicts are defined as conflicts in which the prerequisites of family roles are incompatible with the requirements at home, and participation in one distracts the other (Higgins et al., 1992). One of the topics of interest to researchers was psychological issues that arose because of these conflicts, which tell us about individual problems in balancing and reducing the conflict between work and home (Sheikh et al., 2018). The most important effect of these conflicts is on the satisfaction of working women (Erkmen and Esen, 2014). Work and life satisfaction are two components of individual health that affect a female entrepreneur's behavior, such as depression, dysthymia, anxiety, stress, mental health (Parasurman & Simmers, 1995), and their children's life and education (Ahmad, 1996). Individual perfectionism is another component that has been considered a lot. The tendency of a working woman to be the best employee, best wife and/or best mother is one of the effects of perfectionism, which is closely related to the level of work-family conflict (Burns & Deuling, 2017). In recent years, with changes in economic growth and more familiarity with entrepreneurship, and the increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in communities, work-family conflicts have come to be considered as one of the barriers to entrepreneurial business growth. With more women entering the realm of entrepreneurship, its concept has also been categorized according to gender because, compared to men, women entrepreneurs always face various limitations and problems. Research on obstacles facing women entrepreneurs in different countries shows that there are three barrier categories. The first category consists of barriers that any entrepreneur may experience, irrespective of gender. The second category consists of barriers that are more severe for women entrepreneurs due to family, social and legal conditions. In addition, the

third category includes barriers that only female entrepreneurs may experience (Hughes et al., 2012). Obviously, these obstacles are more intense for women entrepreneurs in developing than in developed countries. In this regard, studies have investigated the role of various factors such as culture, social values and beliefs, religion, social norms and state-supportive laws in reducing work-family conflict as one of the most important obstacles for women entrepreneurs (Roomi et al., 2009). In the study of the sources of work-family conflict for women entrepreneurs, a number of factors have been investigated, such as working hours, the flexibility of work schedule, occupational stress (Kim & Ling, 2001), ethnicity, age, the type of business (Mahpul & Abdullah, 2011), investment size, education (Heilbrunn & Davidovitch, 2011), number and age of children (Abdullah&Mahpul, 2005; Heilbrunn & Davidovitch, 2011; Aycan, 2011) and housework (Kim&Ling, 2001).

Opportunity and Necessity-driven Female Entrepreneurs

In 2001, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor defined two distinct groups for the concept of entrepreneurship: necessity and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. The distinction between the two groups is the motivation to start a business (Reinold et al., 2002). Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs establish a business to monetize an opportunity and make a profit, i.e., motivations such as income, independence, etc., are the starting point of their business. On the other hand, necessity-driven entrepreneurs establish a business based on needs or push incentives such as financial and unemployment problems. Based on the motivation to enter a business, entrepreneurial women fall into the same two groups of opportunity and necessity-driven entrepreneurs, and the above definitions are independent of gender (Block & Wagner, 2010). It is considered one of the appropriate theories to explain the state of women's entrepreneurship (Dhar et al., 2022).

Due to the economic conditions and sanctions imposed on Iran, the annual rate of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship has been constant. On the contrary, necessity-driven entrepreneurship has had an increasing trend. The opportunity-driven entrepreneurship rate for women is almost twice the rate for necessity-driven entrepreneurship (70.5 versus 38.2). While the overall entrepreneurship rate for women is less than half the entrepreneurship rate for men, the gap is significant compared to many other countries (Zali, 2015).

Conditions of Iranian Female Entrepreneurs

According to the latest census in Iran in 2016, Iran's population is 79 million, of which 51 percent are male, and 49 percent are women (Iran's Statistical Yearbook, 2016). Meanwhile, the latest statistics on university admissions in 2018 show that 59% of the applicants were female, compared to 40% male. Changes in lifestyle and the self-assurance of Iranian women today have increased women's desire to have higher education and accept roles other than motherhood. Despite their efforts, their economic participation rates are still far lower than men's. In recent years, the country has witnessed a massive wave of women seeking to engage in entrepreneurship in pursuit of financial and social independence, self-reliance, and being in charge of the household, and the use of online social networks has helped a lot to improve their business (Bouzari et al., 2021). Moreover, some women entrepreneurs have entered new areas of digital businesses (Salamzadeh & Ramadani, 2021). However, due to the economic conditions of the society and sanctions, the rate of entrepreneurship, including the rate of start-ups in Iran, declined from 13% in 2017 to 10% in 2018. However, this culture of entrepreneurship among young people, especially those with a university education, has attracted a lot of attention. Having an average level of income in the world, Iran has an entrepreneurial activity rate of 6.6 and ranks 32nd among 48 countries. Meanwhile, with respect to entrepreneurship opportunities for women in 2018, Iran ranks 30th among 48 countries (Bosma & Kelly, 2019). These statistics show that despite the efforts of women to have higher education and presence in society and the role they play in the economy, there are still many problems on their way that prevent them from exploiting increasing entrepreneurial opportunities. A survey of the gender gap index in countries shows that Iran ranks last among 149 countries. In Iran, the pressure posed by these challenges is very high for female entrepreneurs. House chores and the disapproval of family members about working outside are among the most important challenges for Iranian female entrepreneurs (Modarresi et al., 2017).

Methodology

The present research is applied in terms of purpose and uses a qualitative methodology for data collection. Therefore, the following question aims at identifying the sources of labor-family conflict for Iranian

women entrepreneurs as a topic that has been neglected in Iran. So, interviews were conducted with Iranian female entrepreneurs. Interviews are a common tool for collecting information through direct verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Cohen & Manion, 1986). Thus, we can attain a deeper understanding of the subjects (here female entrepreneurs), attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, cultures and lifestyles (Modarresi et al., 2016).

Sampling and Data Collection

The statistical population of the research includes female entrepreneurs in the Semnan province engaged in industry, economics, knowledge-based firms, services, agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism, manufacturing and handicrafts. They had established their entrepreneurial efforts in different cities and villages of the Semnan province, which were especially related to agriculture, husbandry and handicrafts. They had a minimum of 3-5 years of experience "from the start of the business", which is the length of time needed for a business to grow, according to the criterion defined by GEM. This criterion for business growth was considered because female entrepreneurs who own growing businesses are more likely to experience work-family conflict than their counterparts. Therefore, they were assumed to provide more and better information in this regard. The characteristics of the statistical population are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demography of the interviewees

		Frequency
Age	Below 30	1
	30-40	6
	40-50	2
	Over 50	6
Education	Under High school	4
	High school	3
	Undergraduate & graduate	6
	PhD	2
Marital Status	Single	1
	Married	11
	Divorced	3
	Widowed	-

		Frequency
Children	None	2
	One	7
	Two	2
	More than two	4
Work type	Handcraft	5
	Services	1
	Agriculture & Animal husbandry	2
	Production & Industries	6
	Knowledge-based	1

Data Analysis

In this research, semi-structured and purposeful interviews (15 interviews) were conducted for data collection. The interview questions were extracted based on the statement of the problem and the related literature in order to formulate a framework for the interviews. The process of data collection was stopped when theoretical saturation was achieved and similar qualitative findings were found (Rao & Perry, 2003). The analysis of the interviews and data was done using coding and content analysis. To achieve qualitative validity, the coding was reviewed and approved by several individuals.

Findings

The findings from interviews were coded and classified into three stages: 1) Identification of evidence and summarization of qualitative evidence, 2) identification of the basic concepts, and 3) identification of the categories. As a result, 201 open codes were identified that were categorized into four main sources of conflict: occupational, family, personal and socio-cultural. Table 3 shows the findings at this stage.

Work-family Conflict with Occupational Sources

One of the common sources of conflict for women entrepreneurs pertains to their jobs, which may entail long working hours and not having enough time for attending to personal matters, stress caused by responsibilities entrusted to them, working on holidays, and financial

disputes in families who have established family cooperatives. Long working hours that result in self-sacrifice by the female entrepreneur and dedication of all the time that is left to her for children and her husband is one of the sources of conflict for female entrepreneurs. Despite financial success, female entrepreneurs have no time for themselves. Zahra, a 37-year-old entrepreneur, who spent six years in business, points this out:

> "I am a very disciplined person. I am a planner. My husband admits that I have managed to do all house chores like a homemaker. But in the end, I put myself last. When other ladies are shopping and hanging out, I dedicate my time to my family and doing unfinished house chores.

However, numerous other women mentioned a lack of time to help their children with school homework and doing house chores, which is a result of their long working hours. Moreover, the differences and conflicts at work affect their mood at home and may change their behavior with their husbands and children.

Stress from work responsibilities is another source of conflict faced by female entrepreneurs. Soheila, a fifty-two-year-old entrepreneur, and the head of a manufacturing and industrial factory says:

> "Being an entrepreneur requires a lot of patience. I myself was more good-tempered 10 years ago. Now I know what stress we, entrepreneurs, go through. On the 26th day of every month, all I'm worried about whether I will be able to pay my employees or not. For me, it's all stress."

Maryam, 28, mother to a child, and an entrepreneur in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry, commented on the allocation of holidays to work: "I study and take care of my child. So, holidays are a good time to work. My husband can help me with the technical stuff."

The most important area of conflict for women, who create family cooperatives for some reason (e.g., lack of financial and/or family support), is family disputes over work and financial issues. Maryam, 28, who has made a family cooperative on agricultural land and animal husbandry through family support, states:

> "As a family-run cooperative, we are always on the lookout for a series of family frustrations related to financial matters. We try to always keep squabbles to the least, but there is always something. For example, my

father is old. He says something, then I say, for example: "Dad, it's not like this", and he gets upset. He says he has the experience, and he knows what to do. But we want to do something modern, to do something new."

Work-family Conflicts with Familial Sources

Family is the source of many conflicts, including the loss of many job opportunities because family members put family before work. On the other hand, the spouse, children and their age, and the family's disapproval at the outset of the work are other sources for this type of conflict. While many female entrepreneurs face a lot of difficulties and hardships to keep their business up and running, in many cases, for example, by spending more time with family, they lose opportunities. Monireh, a fifty-nine-year-old mother with three children and an entrepreneur in the field of handicrafts, says:

> "Once, there was a fair in Oman and they [Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Iran] said that they could make arrangements for me to go there and sell my products. I said that it was the New Year holidays and that I could not leave the kids and go. Pity... I lost it."

The examination of the sources of conflict related to the spouse is widespread and significant. This research classified them into: a) The conditions of the husband, which caused problems for women entrepreneurs, and included his addiction, unemployment, behavioral issues, and illness. Many of these lead to financial and livelihood problems; b) Husband's dissatisfaction or verbal confrontation about home grooming and meal preparation and childcare, or behavioral and mental problems as a result of the achievements of the women and their financial independence and positions. Fahimeh, 27, an industrial sector entrepreneur with two children under 10 states:

> "I didn't find my own way. Please tell me if you found a solution! When a woman is successful, becomes the center of attention, and earns a higher income, etc., her husband begins to envy her, and this causes problems. When you start to earn more income, they just stop being supportive! When a man is successful, his wife is proud of

> him, and she supports him. But I don't know why when a woman is successful, her husband cuts off his support."

According to numerous women, young children are with their mothers at work for some hours of the day. At first glance, it might be easy to neglect this issue. However, after some questions into the interview, it became evident that this occasionally causes stress for mothers and leads to incidents for children and, hence, the husband's dissatisfaction. This kind of conflict was, of course, not observed with women whose children were older. On the contrary, women with adult children benefit from their support and assistance in house chores and even in business (Interviewee 4). However, younger children are a major concern for women.

With women who had begun their entrepreneurial efforts before marriage, part of the conflicts was related to their families. These women argued that, in addition to long hours of work, among other issues, families believe most businesses take so long to become profitable and prefer a job with fixed working hours and a specific salary. This goes against the concept of entrepreneurship, where a reliable income is not ensured. Of course, this is true in the early years of work when the entrepreneur has not achieved profitability yet. This conflict can also be categorized under cultural conflicts. However, as the main pressure here was from the family, the author considered it a family conflict.

Work-family Conflicts with a Personal Origin

All the female entrepreneurs interviewed ranged in age from 28 to 60 years. For people over 50, the inability to work due to physical issues and overwork was the main personal conflict. Monireh, 59, said:

> "I have sciatica and a herniated disk. Although I like to do the tasks myself, I have to suffice to only manage the work. I try to train young women to learn the weaving profession to help preserve it. Would be a pity if it died away."

On the other hand, in terms of behavior, female entrepreneurs in the industry have acquired a violent and masculine temperament. Their children sometimes compare their mothers' behavior with the softer behavior of other mothers and complain. Soheila, an entrepreneur in the industry, believes: "This environment has made me a more violent and more serious person than my sister. This change naturally affects my family, too; I'd say

the way my sister deals with her daughter is different than the way I do, and this is because of what I do."

Work-family Conflicts with Socio-cultural Origins

Some women argue that family support is highly influenced by their gender perspective. A son is provided with various types of support, while it is very limited with daughters.

If I hadn't insisted, if I was not determined, I'm sure my family would have stopped me from doing what I was doing because I was a girl. When you're a boy, they support you. Maybe, they even give you some money to start. If you fail as a boy, they back you because you have to provide for a family. But for a woman, entrepreneurship is baseless! (Interviewee No. 5)

Insecurity at work is another problem, which is the result of the discriminatory view of society towards women. Insecurity occurs in the forms of verbal abuse, harassment at work, creating obstacles, and leaving women out of deals and contracts. A single mother with one child and recently divorced because of her husband's addiction and violence, Somayeh runs her own bakery. She says, "Before starting my business, I worked with lots of men in a company. Their behavior was not new to me. But in a company like that, you deal with at most 20 men a day. Today, I'm dealing with 1,000 people every day. Some men flirt and say unpleasant things to you and it's hard. After a while, I got accustomed to it. I thought to myself that there is no shame in working. I just ignored them."
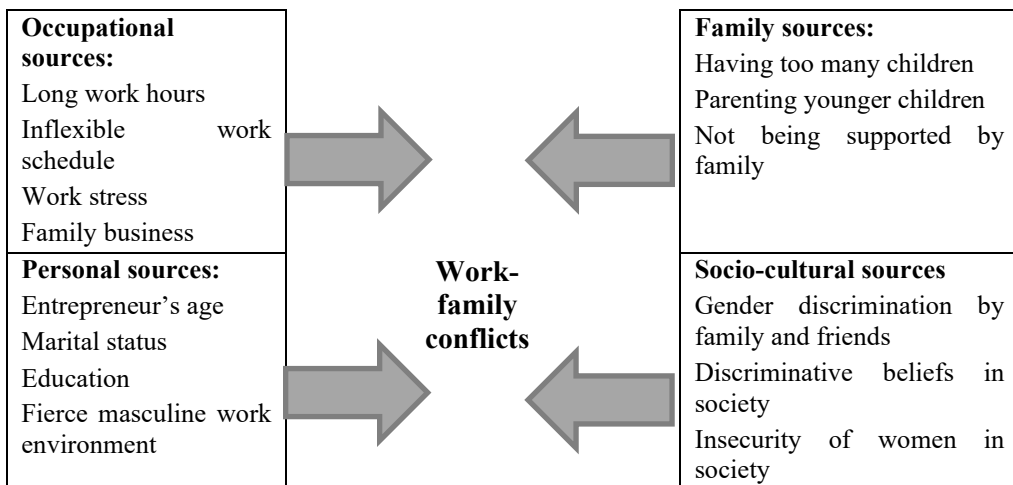
Another woman working in the industrial field, the CEO of a large factory, said:

> It was hard for me because they hardly accepted me as their CEO or as an artisan. A week ago, a colleague brought me a letter from the Industrial Managers Association. I knew they had our names, but in the letter, they had addressed me with the title "Mr.". In meetings, if they realize that the manager or CEO of a firm is a woman, they will not even consider the quality and blatantly ignore your product because they prefer to talk and do business with men. (Interviewee No. 6).

Table 3: Coding of the comments obtained from the interviews

Sources of work-family conflict

Main codes	Open codes	Interviewee code
Occupational sources	The negative effect of occupational issues	1,4,5,6,13,14
	Not dedicating time to oneself	2,3,4,5,6,7,14,15
	Having a busy schedule	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,13,14
	Work stress resulting from workplace tasks	4,5,6,7,15
	Working at holidays	2,3,10,13,14
	Financial disputes in family businesses	3,11
	Differences of opinion in family businesses	3
Family sources	Losing a work opportunity to stay with family	1,14
	Spouse's dissatisfaction with work conditions	7,14
	Spouse's special conditions	2,5,12,13,14
	Children's condition during work hours	2,7,8,9,11,12,14
	Not being accepted and/or supported by family at the beginning	5
Personal sources	Old-age-related loss of physical functions	1,9
	Adopting fierce masculine behavior	4,6
Socio-cultural sources	Discrimination of the family towards family members when supporting their businesses	2,5,6,7,14
	Insecurity resulting from living in a male-dominated society and facing unconventional behavior from men	2,3,4,5,6,14,15

Diagram 1. The model extracted from the qualitative data

Occupational sources:
Long work hours
Inflexible work schedule
Work stress
Family business

Personal sources:
Entrepreneur's age
Marital status
Education
Fierce masculine work environment

Work-family conflicts

Family sources:
Having too many children
Parenting younger children
Not being supported by family

Socio-cultural sources
Gender discrimination by family and friends
Discriminative beliefs in society
Insecurity of women in society

Results and Discussion

To identify the sources of work-family conflict among the Iranian female entrepreneurs, 15 semi-structured interviews were done with the respondents. According to the results, work-family conflicts were classified into four groups: occupational, family, personal, and socio-cultural.

Occupational conflicts, long working hours, not dedicating enough time to oneself, and occupational stress were mentioned by most interviewees. Financial and personal differences with family members were among the identified codes in this part, not mentioned by women. In the case of family-related matters, the most important factor leading to a conflict was children. Young children and parenting issues were the most important challenge for women, and then factors related to the spouse played a significant role. In the family dimension, dissatisfaction of the husbands and families with the women entrepreneurs' work was another case mentioned by the women, which was much less mentioned by the respondents. In the social dimension, societal insecurity and unconventional behavior by men were the main sources of conflict. It seems that this is affected by the patriarchal culture of society. And finally, in the personal dimension, the impact of a male-dominant work environment, having a harsh disposition, old age, and reduction in activities were the codes that were much less mentioned.

The results of this research can be used to contrast the necessity-driven entrepreneurship theory with the opportunity-driven entrepreneurship theory. Accordingly, in the first group, in the case of women whose husbands were addicted, unemployed, or sick, financial problems were initially a major factor in self-employment. Divorced women or women whose spouses are imprisoned for some reason fall in this group, too. In this group, there were fewer women with higher education, and they mostly held a high school diploma or lower educational degrees. These results are in line with the results of Robichchard et al. (2010) and Nasiri and Hamelinfar (2018). Despite the great difficulty, dedication, and long working hours, these women were highly satisfied, and this satisfaction arose from proper living conditions for the growth and education of their children. Most of these necessity-driven female entrepreneurs had family businesses. In the second group, i.e., the opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, women had higher education and were engaged in entrepreneurship after registering a patent, offering an applied thesis, being interested in a particular field and being trained in the related courses, having experience in an area, or being retired.

The impact of education on women's growth has been emphasized in previous studies (Wenzel & Beck-Peter, 2020). The same as necessity-driven entrepreneurs, this group of women had a high level of job satisfaction. However, the nature of satisfaction was different; it was the result of gaining a high status in society. Robichaud et al. (2010) found similar results in the survey of female entrepreneurs in Canada. The greatest difference between the two groups of Iranian female entrepreneurs was family conflicts and those related to the spouse. The husbands' dissatisfaction with necessity-driven entrepreneurs was mainly related to not doing house chores and parenting duties. However, in the second group, husbands were not dissatisfied and, in many cases, husbands supported their entrepreneur wives. In the second group, i.e., the opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, when the husband is dissatisfied, there is usually a psychological issue involved. This issue has roots in the wife's accomplishments and her high income, which lead to behavioral stress. In the beginning, when women start a business, their husbands are supportive. In some cases, men had temporarily left their jobs for parenting. However, husbands may behave differently when female entrepreneurs make a profit and obtain a decent position. It seems that, psychologically, men are not capable of bearing the notable success and income of their wives. That is, men prefer to be the ones with higher incomes and better job positions than their wives. Therefore, despite initial encouragement and financial and emotional support, women believe their husbands are dissatisfied with the above condition in cases where they work in the industrial sector and reach high levels of social and financial status.

Apparently, the idea that women are responsible for housekeeping and childcare is as universal. Despite running a business and having an income, married women are still responsible for everything at home. This has been studied in many developing and Muslim countries, such as Sri Lanka, which highlights the lack of cooperation by Sri Lankan men (Kailasapathy & Metz , 2011). In the study of Iranian female entrepreneurs, women always have the primary responsibility for doing the housework and parenting duties in both groups of opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs. However, in the case of opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, support and engagement of the husband are pointed out to reduce work-family conflicts. In Sweden, fathers try to spend more time with their children (Hagqvist et al., 2017). This is the case in other developed countries in the Arctic Circle. Although women and men have an equal role to play in terms of income generation, women are responsible for doing the housework (Hagqvist et al., 2017).

Iranian female entrepreneurs have family support in childcare. Except for women who were away from their families, other women pointed out that their little children stayed with their parents for some hours of the day. Also, 2.38% of Turkish female entrepreneurs referred to the role of grandmothers in taking care of their children (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). This highlights the interplay between family and culture. Hill Brown and Davidovic (2011) compared Arab female entrepreneurs with Jewish female entrepreneurs and found that Arab women, as a result of lower education levels, are more engaged in housework, but have fewer family conflicts. In contrast, Jewish female entrepreneurs lack these sources of support and thus experience more conflicts.

On the one hand, this shows the role of families in Iran. On the other hand, Iranian society does not trust strangers to babysit their children at younger ages. Therefore, the age of children itself is one of the important factors influencing the level of conflict for women. Consistent with the above findings, Padma and Reddy (2013) found the role of younger children in conflicts to be much more significant than adult children. Younger women have younger children and, therefore, need to dedicate more time to them. Meanwhile, women in their 40s and above generally have adult children and believe that it has a role to play in experiencing less or no work-family conflicts. The age of children is one of the main parameters studied by Hill Brown and Davidovic (2011). Alam et al. (2011), in a study on the sources of work-family conflict for female managers in Bangladesh, found that long working hours, therefore, not dedicating time to themselves, and working during holidays are the sources of conflict for Bangladeshi women, which is consistent with results found for female entrepreneurs. One of the sources of socio-cultural conflicts shared by all female entrepreneurs is social insecurity. Necessity-driven female entrepreneurs complain about the poor opportunist manners of men and their verbal abuse. On the other hand, opportunity-driven female entrepreneurs complain about gender discrimination at work, particularly in industrial occupations, transactions, tenders, etc. The significance of conflicts arising from occupational issues (such as work stress, position and the sensitivity of women) has roots in the earnestness and high sense of responsibility of female entrepreneurs. While caring for children, these women focus on their profession. The examination of the sources of conflict highlights the role of occupational stress in the occurrence of conflicts and not having time for doing housework. Kim and Ling (2001) found a significant relationship between flexibility and the number of work hours in the occurrence of work-

family conflicts among Singaporean female entrepreneurs. For women with family-owned cooperatives, the role of financial and subjective conflicts was significant. For other women, this was less significant. In a study on Turkish female entrepreneurs, Welsh et al. (2016) highlight the key role played by families in supporting women. However, in most cases, particularly in family businesses, this role becomes a matter of decision-making, bringing about bigger challenges for women. It seems that the greatest external factors for creating conflict for women are the conditions and the common culture of society. Women with different educational levels and occupations (except for home-based businesses) complain about sexual inequality, male harassment and, even in some cases, about families. Husbands' role and their support are highly important in reducing conflicts. Men's role in creating conflicts starts from not supporting their wives emotionally and intellectually. Aycan and Eskin (2005) also found a negative correlation between spouses' support with work-family conflicts. The results show that, according to spouses, motherhood duties and childcare should be given preference to household chores. Among women over 50 years old, age-related decline in physical function plays a more crucial role. Except for women working in industrial sectors, in other cases, the effect of the workplace environment on women's behavior is insignificant, indicating women's role at home.

As discussed earlier, necessity-driven female entrepreneurs with lower levels of education are involved in entrepreneurship as a result of the financial problems of their spouses. Therefore, the main source of conflict in the family dimension is the special conditions of their spouse. In the same vein, the mean conflict level for women with lower levels of education is higher than other women in occupational, family and personal dimensions. Only in the socio-cultural dimension, the mean conflict level is higher for women with higher levels of education. The reason is clear; high activity level of home-based businesses for women with lower levels of education and, thus, not having enough relationship with society and men. For other women, however, this is not significant. Conflicts for this group of women are changed into financial and intellectual support from their spouses. For this group, i.e., Opportunity-driven female entrepreneurs, occupational problems are more significant. The mean conflict level for divorced women is higher for all dimensions. The reason might be caring for children and providing for the family. It is only in the personal dimension that the mean is higher for married women. This might be due to women's responsibilities towards their spouses. While, according to our research, children are an

important contributor to conflicts, the number of children can also play a significant role; The mean conflict level is higher in all dimensions for women with more than two children. However, the dominant population of the respondents in this study had only one or two children.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

–   The present study has examined Iranian women entrepreneurs. It is suggested that this research be conducted in other cultural contexts in the Middle East, such as the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. As the Middle East is home to ethnic groups with different cultures and traditions, further research could compare the results of similar studies conducted in other countries to achieve a better understanding of the effect of culture, ethnicity, race and religion on work-family conflicts of female entrepreneurs.

–   Moreover, the study of work-family conflicts of female entrepreneurs from a psychological perspective could be the subject of further research. One of the issues pointed out by some women was the support of their spouses at the beginning of their business and the lack of support when the business was growing. This issue can also be examined with a deeper look.

Based on the results of the research, the following general strategies are presented for reducing work-family conflict for women entrepreneurs:

–   Most of the conflicts of female entrepreneurs is a result of not being capable of differentiating between workplace tasks and house chore. Public institutions or NGOs could curb this cognitive conflict.

–   With the increase in the education level of societies, the mindset that house chore has to be done solely by women is fading into irrelevance. However, raising awareness about sharing household chores seems necessary. Achieving this in a community requires more attention from public institutions, especially the media and educational bodies.

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