

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES,
COPING STRATEGIES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
WELLBEING AMONG WORKING MOTHERS IN
MALAYSIA

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES, COPING
STRATEGIES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG WORKING
MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA

By

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG WORKING MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA.

LIM LEE CHUN

The boundary separating work from home is always indistinct. This makes both domains mutually incompatible for working mothers. Where different cultural settings might influence working mothers' challenges, coping strategies and their perceptions on PWB, and considering most of work and family issues has been conducted predominantly in Western countries, the relevant issue and coping strategies in work-family literature in Malaysian population is less profound. (Mahamad et al., 2021) Thus, this study is aimed to examine the challenges, coping strategies and psychological wellbeing among working mothers in Malaysian context. Qualitative case study has been employed to explore the challenges faced, the coping strategies adopted and the contributory impact of the coping strategies to their PWB. Five married fulltime working mothers in Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur have been recruited to participate in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was done to analyse the data manually. The findings of this study highlight the key challenge the participants had that was having to shoulder multiple roles and responsibilities. The participants revealed that self-management appeared to be their main coping strategies in

face of the challenges. Generally, they opined positive relationship and life purpose are the goal commitment they strive for their PWB. The study provided understanding to the society on the challenges faced by working mothers, the circle of support and the policies organizations can focus to help them. It also contributed to the importance of implementing work-life balance and fostering culture focused on the PWB of working mothers. Considering the fact that the study makes contributions to TTSC theory and PERMA theory of wellbeing, working mothers will be able to perform more efficiently and serve their role optimally in both profession and motherhood.

Keywords: Challenges, coping strategies, psychological well-being, working mother

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APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation entitled **“AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG WORKING MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA”** was prepared by **LIM LEE CHUN** and submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Psychology (Industrial and Organizational Psychology)** in Faculty of Arts and Social Science at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

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SUBMISSION OF DISSERTATION

It is hereby certified that **LIM LEE CHUN** (ID No: **21AAM02126**) has completed this dissertation entitled “An Exploratory Study on The Challenges, Coping Strategies and Psychological Well-being Among Working Mothers in Malaysia” under the supervision of Puan Wirawahida Binti Kamarul Zaman from the Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, and Ms. Lee Wan Ying (Co-Supervisor) from the Department of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science.

I understand that University will upload softcopy of my dissertation in pdf format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,

Lim Lee Chun

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DECLARATION

I, LIM LEE CHUN, hereby declare that the dissertation is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.

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Date: 15 March 2024

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PWB	Psychological Wellbeing
TTSC	Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the study by first discussing the background of study, followed by the problem statement, the research objectives and research questions, the significance of study. Subsequently, the key information about the research topic is summarized by the conceptual definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of study

Motherhood can be a journey of blessings and rewards for many women. However, in the case of working mothers, it appears to be an indomitable task of needing to integrate the quadruple and diverse roles of being a wife, a mother, a home manager, and an employee simultaneously (Anwar et al., 2017). For those who are in higher and upper management positions with heavy responsibilities in the workplace, motherhood puts them under tremendous pressure (Kadale et al., 2018). This is also supported by research conducted by IPSOS (*Institut de Publique Sondage d'Opinion Secteur*) on women's equality in 2018 where Malaysian women ranked balancing work and parental responsibilities as one of the top issues faced (Ipsos, 2018).

Is fulfilling the expectations in both family and work life unattainable? The arduous daily schedule seems to overwhelm working mothers. Having to juggle between pursuing a career alongside personal life, a high amount of energy and commitment are needed for them to work around the clock in accomplishing the wide range of tasks required in both domains. This is consistent with a report by McKinsey & Company (2021) that showed how working mothers have the longest working hours, as they have to work ‘double shifts’, or a second shift. This is a term coined by *Arlie Russell Hochschild*, a professor of sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1989. She investigated and described the double burden experienced by late-20th-century employed mothers. The term notably implies that the unpaid domestic labor of care work falls solely on employed mothers. Some even recounted being forced into ‘triple shifts’, having to fulfil demands at work, as well as attending to family commitments as a mother and a home manager (Huopainen & Satama, 2018).

Moreover, in a UK Household Longitudinal Study of more than 6000 participants, Professor Tarani Chandola from the University of Manchester, and a team of researchers from the Social and Economic Research Institute at Essex University, have found that working mothers are 18% more stressed than those without children. With every additional child, the stress level soars by 40% in comparison (Chandola et al., 2019).

So, how do working mothers straddle both worlds of professional work and motherhood by managing societal expectations, personal expectations, and daily realities in order to fulfil the responsibilities required? This question is the main impetus behind my research. Based on the study reported by The Star (2020), the female labor force participation rate in Malaysia is 56%. It has been ranked the third lowest in the Asean region, which is somewhat higher than Philippines and Indonesia, but relatively lower than Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Malaysian Labor Force Survey in the year 2018 also revealed that 60.2% of women have indicated that factors attributed to not being part of the workforce include household chores, children, and elderly care. Meanwhile, a study conducted by The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) in September 2019 the macroeconomic simulation showed that Malaysia's income per capita could be boosted by 26.2%, provided that more women progressively enter the labour market. This shall potentially push Malaysia's GDP to RM 9 billion, which is tantamount to an average annual income gain of RM9,400 for every Malaysian.

Women who enter the workforce can therefore contribute significantly to the national economy but due to the multiple roles they have to handle, especially for those who are working mothers, this situation may result in burnout and adversely affect their psychological well-being. Because of a lack of understanding and support for working mothers, many women either do not join the workforce or leave upon getting married and having children. In line with this, a balanced partnership in dual-earner families where husbands and wives

share domestic chores and childcare equally; and organizations in both the public and private sectors which implement female-friendly practices and policies would promote an ideal work environment and culture that encourage more women to join the workforce again (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018).

Thus, working mothers are strongly encouraged to proactively bring the issues pertaining to the conventionality of social rules and expectations underlying the gender bias in the workforce to forefront. Such heightened awareness helps to create an inviting environment of support for them, which can lead to more empowered and happier employees, better leaders, lower turnover rate, higher morale, and an overall positive impact on the organization's culture (International Labor Organization, 2017).

1.2 Problem Statement

Researchers have found that due to unequal demands at home, 28% of the women were prone to burnout compared to men, especially working mothers, who generally experienced higher levels of stress as compared to stayed-home mothers (Leonhardt, 2020). While experiencing the joy and satisfaction of raising children, working mothers have myriads of challenges every day. The greater psychological stress they face profoundly affects their performance both at work and home (Ravindranath et.al., 2021). This is further supported by Zhou et al. (2018). Such stress negatively affects their life satisfaction, which potentially leads to lower engagement, lower productivity, and more

psychological issues. It makes them less productive and underperformed, which subsequently hinders organizational growth and success.

Based on a recent study by McKinsey (2022), 8 working mothers from United States, Netherlands, Mexico, and Dubai were interviewed about the realities and challenges they face during the pandemic. Their answers were as varied as their backgrounds and experiences, but some common themes emerged, including the difficulties of maintaining a work-life balance. As the world started to return to normal and come out of the pandemic last year, their stance has not changed much, as the struggle of working while being a mother remained (McKinsey, 2022). It is believed that working mothers in Malaysia would have similar concerns.

Supposedly, a clear segregation has to be maintained to attain a work-life balance. Nevertheless, with evolving occupational demands and the threat of career obsolescence, the boundary separating work from home is nowadays indistinct. Working mothers from all over the world often feel overwhelmed and exhausted. To attain an adequate balance in both work and family domains is directly linked to better life satisfaction. Eventually, working mothers will be able to contribute efficiently and serve optimally in both roles as professionals and mothers (Gragnano et al., 2020). As such, my study aims to achieve the research objectives as below: -

1.3 Research Objectives (RO)

There are three research objectives for the study:

1. To examine working mothers' challenges when balancing between work and family.
2. To identify the coping strategies adopted when balancing the roles in both work and family domains.
3. To explore the psychological wellbeing (Hereinafter referred to as PWB) of working mothers following the implementation of coping strategies.

1.4 Research Questions (RQ)

There are three RQ for this study to achieve the RO:

1. What are the challenges working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family life?
2. What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges in both the work and family domains?
3. How do working mothers perceive their PWB after implementing specific coping strategies?

1.5 Significance of Research

As mentioned in problem statement, the boundary separating work from home is indistinct. This makes both domains mutually incompatible for working mothers. Pertaining to this, Mahamad et al. (2021) noted that most research on work and family issues has been conducted predominantly in Western countries

such as Australia (Newcomb, 2021) and United Kingdom (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018). In contrast, the issue of working mothers' challenges, stress, well-being, and relevant coping strategies in work-family literature in the Malaysian population is less profound and far from being researched (Arham et.al.,2019). Hence, this study is able to fill the gaps by studying the work-family interface within the Malaysian context to gain more understanding of the real-life experience and challenges faced by employed working mothers here.

From a theoretical perspective, my study also sheds light on how work and life can be better integrated for working mothers, by providing valuable information for Human Resource practitioners to gain deeper understanding of their struggles, so the relevant authorities can implement better work policies that support and improve the PWB among working mothers.

Whereas, from a practical perspective, the research data collected in my study are assisting more working mothers to gain a new perspective by redefining their roles and negotiating what their duties are. As such, they will be able to maintain a clear segregation between both domains. As the participants in my study shared about their coping strategies that contribute positively to their PWB, it becomes useful resource for other employed mothers to draw on these relevant experiences and apply them to their own advantage.

As such, working mothers can learn and be well aware of what the stressors are and manage accordingly, hence living an optimal life while contributing to shaping their children and serving the organization role more efficiently. Thus, my study is significant as the discoveries made can outline strategies in order to achieve a win-win situation not only for the working mothers themselves, but also for the family and the organization in which they work.

Furthermore, analysis of the experiences of challenges faced by working mothers and the impacts on their PWB will be able to provide insights for relevant parties to support for working mothers' professional and personal developments. To fill the gap, the findings of this study can serve as a basis in providing guidelines and references for the Department for Women's Development (also known as *Jabatan Pembangunan Wanita*), the Department of Labour, the Human Resources Division, the Training Unit, and other relevant organizations in developing and formulating programs that encapsulate specific career aspect of working mothers, in lines with the of socio-economic growth and development in Malaysia. Fostering a nurturing work environment and enhancing mother-friendly employment policy practices can be of great help (Mothers at Work: How Inclusive Policies Can Help Them Balance Their Dual Duties, 2023). It can gradually become a guiding philosophy in the workplaces across industries.

1.6 Conceptual Definition of Key Terms

To act as a foundation for the research problem and literature reviews, this section presents a clearer view of the research idea to enable better engagement by defining the key terms conceptually.

1.6.1 Challenges

IGI Global (a leading international academic publisher, headquartered in Hershey, Pennsylvania) defines challenges as something that by its nature serves as a call to make special effort, a demand to justify, or difficulty in an undertaking to which one is engaged (Sarinporn Chaivisit et al., 2024). In the context of working mothers, challenges constitute a set of situations and problems that require great mental energy and effort, perseverance, and determination to deal with.

Despite the growth and rising importance of women in the labor market, when it comes to balancing personal and professional life, it is obviously a major test for working mothers to keep up a harmony between their work and family. Performing multiple tasks in both domains is physically and mentally taxing. This significantly prompts more pressure. In other words, the balance turns out to be an ongoing battle when it comes to dealing with such difficult trade-offs (Kadale et.al., 2018). Below are some challenges faced by working mothers. More has been elaborated in Chapter 2.

1.6.1.1 Cultural Perceptions and Social Expectations of Gender

Differences. In a working mother's context, family needs are taken to be more important than theirs. For instance, in terms of the division of household labor and childcare responsibilities, while statistics demonstrate that men have begun to take much greater duty in performing such family obligations nowadays compared to previous times. Nonetheless, working mothers still need to hold up under the significant heap of domestic obligations.

For instance, being a working mother, dealing with sick children is one of the significant challenges. Bearing in mind, organizations only give leave to unwell employees, while working mothers need to utilize their annual leaves or apply for unpaid leaves to attend to their sick children. As a result, working mothers need to work relatively more hours than working fathers due to such unequal demands.

The fatigue and stress led to them venting out their frustration and anger their spouses for not doing their share of domestic obligations. Consequently, not only was there an absence of time for personal interests, but also a reduction of intimacy between spouses. Regardless of whether working mothers do have some fragmented time, they found themselves excessively drained. Their multiple roles have taken considerable amount of time and removed more opportunities for them to rest. This obviously prompts fractiousness, especially when the tense domestic situation becomes a risk factor

for higher divorce rates (Urrutia, 2024). Even the children's emotional needs are left unaddressed.

1.6.1.2 Workplace Discrimination. Working mothers might be perceived as being less committed to the work. Irrespective of their capabilities, society's expectations and cultural factors leave many working mothers feeling disempowered and suffer from perceived neglect of either role (Khokhar et al., 2020). This eventually prompts low employment fulfillment, higher turnover rate, and other psychological issues.

1.6.1.3 Motherhood Myth. Besides pressure from the workplace, as mentioned earlier, in the working mother's context, family needs are taken to be more important than theirs. In Ladge and Little's study (2019), a good mother is portrayed as one who makes their career aspirations secondary to their mothering role. The myths have put undue pressure on working mothers, who are clearly in a dilemma. On one hand, they have been perceived as less dedicated in the workplace by needing to excuse themselves due to family demands at times. While on the other hand, they have also been criticized for not spending sufficient time with their children being a full-time employee.

1.6.2 Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are conscious efforts adopted by working mothers to

deal with stressful situations. That being said, despite juggling multiple responsibilities between the two domains, there is always a solution to tackle the difficulties in order for working mothers to maintain a career and a great family simultaneously (Rajgariah, 2021). In view of the challenges mentioned, if working mothers are unable to figure out how to adjust various roles as well as to maintain the balance between responsibilities at work and at home, it will adversely impact their PWB. Nevertheless, arrangements do exist. Below are some coping strategies that they can consider workable and could help keep their family members and those at work happy, and obviously themselves.

1.6.2.1 Emotion-focused Coping. Emotion-focused coping is likely to be utilised when working mothers perceive a situation to be stressful. This coping seems to be common for them to handle work and family demands. For instance, when working mothers engage in some activities they like, they manage and regulate their negative emotions by way of emotion-focused coping.

1.6.2.2 Problem-focused Coping. Problem-focused coping is adopted when working mothers confront the problem and address the issues to cope with various demands. In the family context, a problem-focused strategy involves restructuring family roles to accommodate family demands. While in the work context, prioritizing tasks or delegation within teams can be good options.

1.6.2.3 Family Support. When working mothers are overwhelmed by their workloads, it could be due to the absence of support and help. Rather than carrying the burden alone, support from family members, especially spouses, in sharing domestic obligations can help tremendously. It acts as a buffer to protect her from suffering high stress levels.

1.6.2.4 Hiring Domestic Help. Besides family support, hiring domestic help can efficiently reduce the burden of daily household chores, too. With such help, working mothers can focus more on their work and spend more quality time with their husbands and children.

1.6.3 Psychological Wellbeing (PWB)

Having to shoulder myriad roles in both family and work domains, the hectic schedule and strenuous workload can adversely affect a working mother's PWB. However, if they manage to cope with their stress by adopting the coping strategies that best suit them, they will be able to find contentment within challenges, that's where a state of balance is reached.

1.6.3.1 State of Balance Between Challenges and Rewards. According to Ryff (1989), PWB is attained by achieving a state of balance between both challenging and rewarding life events. In other words, it is about 'how we are doing', 'how we feel about ourselves', 'how satisfied we are with

our lives’, and how these aspects are sustainable. People with high PWB report experiencing positive emotion and a sense of control, well-supported by positive relationships. It can reasonably be defined based on a broader dimension that includes personal well-being, quality relationships, physical and mental health, personal finance (which includes household income and wealth, distribution, and stability), education achievement and skills. These are the factors that matter for most to thrive.

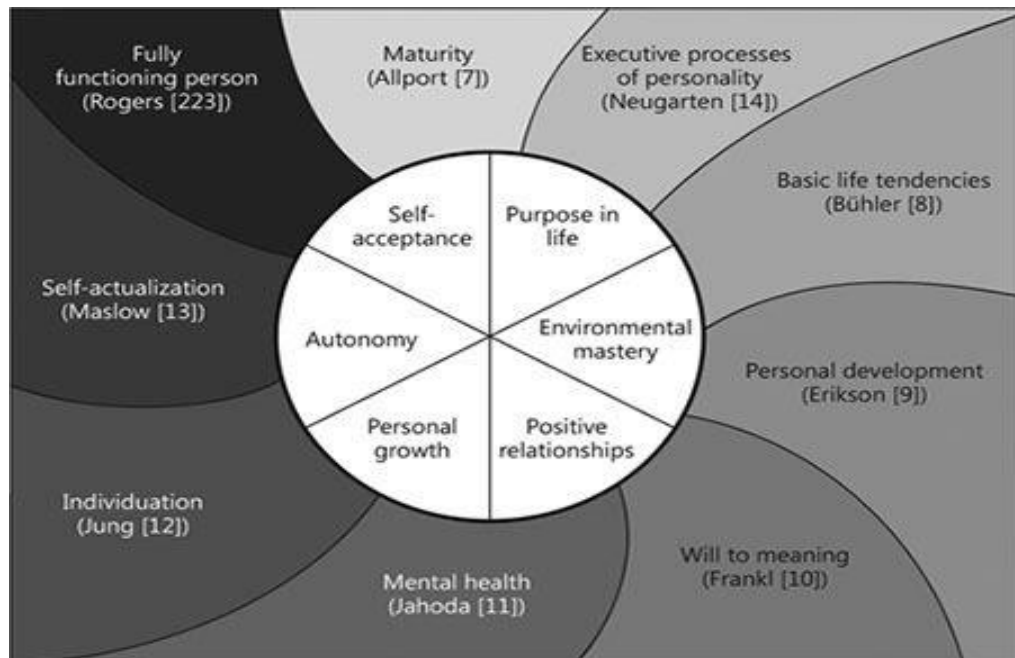
Some major determinants of PWB can be influenced by a person’s inborn temperament, personality, the quality of their social relationships as well as the societies they live in. Thus, the concept of ‘PWB’ varies a great deal within and between individuals (Burns, 2017). Hence, Diener (1984) posited wellbeing as subjective and it is an essential part of overall PWB. Different people hold different values to be important to their PWB, which encompasses life satisfaction, a sense of autonomy, a sense of meaning, a sense of purpose, personal mastery, personal growth and development, and positive relationships with others (Ruggeri et al., 2020). As such, the term is adaptive to different contexts and perspectives.

Some of the negative outcomes which researchers who studied work-family challenges and conflicts have noted include absenteeism, poor morale, reduced productivity (Bartone et al., 1998); employee retention difficulties (Greenhaus et al., 2001); and family distress (Frone et al., 1992), decreased

family satisfaction (Kopelman et al., 1983) and increased marital tension (Brett et al., 1992). Various research pieces of literature identify a need for the present study to investigate the potentially positive and negative life experiences that working mothers may perceive from balancing their multiple roles at work and home. In attempting to achieve this, the said experiences may be explored through the core dimensions of PWB proposed by Ryff (2013).

Figure 1.1

Core dimensions of PWB (Ryff, 2014)



1.6.3.2 PWB in Working Mother’s Contexts. In the case of working mothers, so long as the multifaceted nature of their experiences across multiple domains has been adequately addressed, the consideration and support as mentioned under ‘coping strategies’ can prompt positive consequences for their

PWB. However, when working mothers lack the capacity to deal with themselves by needing to confront numerous issues which are literally energy draining, sleep deprivation or wretchedness is noteworthy that working mothers more often than not experience the adverse effects on their PWB. Under such mental weight, their PWB decreased tremendously.

As such, it is a vitally important for working mothers to invest in and maintain their PWB for the long-term benefits to themselves (Raza et.al., 2018). Ruggeri et al. (2020) noted that PWB increases self-motivation and contribute to high performance. Besides careers, working mothers also play roles as mothers, wives, home managers, and even carers of their elderly parents or in-laws. Having this in mind, their PWB is not only for themselves, but for their husband and children, sometimes including elderly family members. As such, their PWB is not only crucial for the well-being of their entire family, but also an important consideration for the community as a whole.

1.7 Conclusion

As a matter of fact, working mothers' wellbeing has been a growing concern (Lamar et.al., 2020). While the stress and struggle encountered might be perceived to be alike in nature, social expectations, and cultural constructions however, make 'meaning' and 'experience' unique for each individual (Kadale et al., 2018). Hence, chapter 2 will probe into these aspects for a broader view.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a comprehensive review on the subject matter, this chapter 2 dives into the literature of other previous research to which my study is related and has some bearing. Basically, this chapter is divided into several sections. It first started with a chronological review of women joining the workforce and how dual-earner families become a trend in Malaysia's households. Next, it enumerates the factors and challenges affecting working mothers in balancing their roles in family and work domains. Then, it expands upon the background information presented in conceptual definition of key terms in Chapter 1 concerning of challenges, coping strategies and PWB. Thereafter, it discusses the theoretical framework that serves as a foundation of my study; and also explains the conceptual framework that acts as a road map guiding the course of my study.

2.1 Chronological Review of Women Entering the Workforce in Malaysia

With the changing times, the numbers of employed working mothers and dual-earner households are increasing. Women are no longer restricted to their conventional gender roles as housewives and housemakers. Instead, they

have started to become actively engaged in the professional world, and many of them even thrive in many different professions and areas of work. According to the Principal Statistics of Labour Force in Malaysia in 2019, the number of women in the workforce has been rising to the present of 6.18 million. Statistics has also shown that there is an exponential growth rate of female labour force participation (LFPR) from 0.1% to 56.1% in the fourth quarter of 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2019).

For women, while work provides them with financial independence and a sense of accomplishment, the family also provides them with the foundation where if choosing to become a mother, it offers emotional fulfilment and develops their ability to raise good members of society. As mentioned in the background of the study, motherhood can be a journey of blessings and rewards. Along with that, such accomplishment adds to the completeness of being a woman.

2.2 Dual-earner Families

Over the decades, the cost of living is rising a lot faster than wages can keep up. Dual earners family has hence become a trend in many Malaysian households. Although dual income may seem to contribute to a more comfortable lifestyle for the family, however, work and family spheres are literally two domains that intertwine with gender expectations. Both roles tend to persist in being shaped along gender lines. The blurring boundary has made

drawing a line between priorities becomes a daunting task. For instance, while men's familial responsibility is confined to the role of breadwinner, but traditionally, childcare falls solely on women. Therefore, working mothers will have to fulfil their gendered role as home managers, despite being the joint breadwinner (Lamar et al., 2020).

2.3 Challenges of Working Mothers

The struggle to prioritize tasks at work and for the family takes a toll on working mothers' physical and mental health, due to the fact that more laborious physical care responsibilities which can be unrelenting, are undertaken typically by them (Mordi et al., 2020). The overwhelming workloads in both domains may cause issues such as sleep deprivation or lack of self-care due to insufficient time. These ultimately lead to negative effects on their PWB. Below are the challenges that affect working mothers in balancing their roles and responsibilities in work and family domains.

2.3.1 Cultural Perceptions and Social Expectation of Gender Differences

Malaysia is a collectivistic society where family is a core element of the social structure, so group's interest is always a priority compared to individual's interest. In other words, in working mothers' context, family's needs are taken to be more important than their own. More often than not, their needs for personal time or rest get sacrificed. This is in contrast with the Western culture which is more individualistically oriented (Fatehi et al., 2020).

2.3.1.1 Uneven Distribution of Domestic Responsibilities.

Basically, domestic responsibilities are referring to tasks that are performed regularly which include cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children, or other dependent family members to ensure their needs are met (Son, 2010).

While women's workforce participation has increased substantially over the years, working mothers are still required to spend relatively more time on household chores than men (Flèche et al., 2020). Despite both parents being co-breadwinners, plenty of studies reflect the issues of uneven distribution of domestic responsibilities (Chesley & Flood, 2016).

However, in more recent times, researchers have observed the trend where men are increasingly engaged with household chores. Congruent with this change, statistics reflect how new fathers have started shouldering more responsibilities in performing domestic tasks compared to the men from Generation X. Nonetheless, mothers still bear most of the domestic obligations, especially the nurturing tasks (Gridiron, 2017). In other words, mothers are presumed to recognize family roles more than fathers despite their progressive inclusion in domestic labour.

In accordance with a report by Malaysia's Khazanah Research Institute, a discrepancy between men and women exists when it comes to time spent on

unpaid care work. While both genders spent relatively equal time on paid labour — 6.9 hours for men and 6.6 hours for women — female respondents were found to spend an average of 3.6 hours on unpaid care work compared to 2.2 hours spent by men. This unpaid labour includes food preparation, household chores and childcare (Eco-Business, 2022).

In Nordic countries where the gender gap is closer, a higher rate of female labour force participation is reported. Whereas for East Asia and Southern Europe, the patriarchal societal norms somehow weaken the participation of women in the workforce (Jayachandran, 2021). On average, across the globe, women spend 4 hours and 22 minutes per day in unpaid domestic labour and care work, compared to 2 hours and 15 minutes for men. Covid-19 has further enlarged the gap. Women are now spending 15 hours more in unpaid labour each week than men.

Due to the fact that the socialization process divides men and women into dichotomous positions, specific traits of their roles are hence gendered (Charmes, 2019). For instance, while women are presumed to have traits like gentle and caring, when the children get sick, it literally means childcare falls through, and they have heavier workloads. As the employers only provide paid sick leave for unwell employees, in most cases, working mothers have to use their annual leave or apply for unpaid leave to take care of their sick children (Kadale et.al., 2018).

2.3.1.2 Workplace Discrimination. It can be a struggle for someone in a management position to be the primary caregiver of her children. In meeting life goals to satisfy financial needs, a working mother may not be able to devote herself to professional advancement on account of having family obligations (Gagnano, 2020). At times, with high levels of productivity anticipated among organisations, the demands of the work environment have exerted immense pressure on their career. As a result, the ceaseless feeling of guilt remain where working mother's priorities and sense of commitment are often questioned (Aarntzen et al., 2019).

In the workplace, they are at the risk of coming across as not being committed enough. They feel judged when they have to leave office on time in order to pick up their children, though they are often getting to work much earlier than others. To a certain extent, some organizations may presume that most working mothers deem their careers as secondary to their families and they prefer to maintain the status quo in their careers for family reasons (Verniers &Vala, 2018).

As a matter of fact, the upper management may not be keen to invest in elevating them through training, assigning high-value big projects, or giving opportunities to working mothers that will help them in career advancement or retain top positions. In such a working environment, working mothers are significantly disadvantaged. They tend to experience higher barriers to

employment, fewer opportunities for career growth and narrower bottlenecks for career advancement due to such workplace discrimination against them (Sharma & Dhir, 2019).

According to Sharma and Dhir (2019), mothers are less likely to be employed compared to fathers and women without children. Despite their qualification and work commitment, working mothers may be regarded as less dedicated to work. Due to such workplace discrimination, they have to take a back seat in their careers, which subsequently lead to lower engagement, lower retention rate and more psychological issues.

Irrespective of their capabilities and desires to thrive professionally, the outsized expectations from society and the internalization of traditional roles that create dichotomies in the roles of men and women leave many working mothers feeling disempowered and suffering from perceived neglect of motherly roles (Khokhar et al., 2020).

Essentially, the core idea behind equality in the workplace is to ensure that everyone in a team has equal rights and opportunities, receiving fair treatment regardless of their gender differences (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). Men and women are supposed to deserve equal treatment and opportunities in the workplace, but gender differences are more pronounced, especially when

overlapping with domestic responsibilities. In meeting a plethora of competitive challenges in any business environments, organizations should leverage the best talents available, and practice gender equality that would tap into talented women and maximize their strengths.

Somehow, traditional gendered roles from collectivistic belief tend to position men above women. As men dominate leadership roles over women, this has been an invisible door that limits working mothers' access to greater performance. Though there has been increasingly better access and more recognition given to women in recent years, the ingrained and internalized patriarchal value system in the workplaces and societies still exists and limits women's opportunities in their day-to-day lives and choices (Mokhtar, 2020). Following that, the progress on closing gender gaps has stalled due to the distribution of uneven domestic responsibilities. This is evident particularly in women with high-paying occupations and managerial positions (Lim, 2019).

2.3.1.3 “Motherhood” Myth. Mothers tend to be glorified and ascribed as the ultimate source of care, love, and emotion-building for their children. They are expected to present themselves in ways that are acceptable by the society. For instance, being the primary nurturer, they are expected to prioritize the family over work, as their role is deemed to be central to their children's all-round development and wellbeing. Many of these supposed

'truths' were, in fact, myths. And when such 'myths' are accepted as gospel, it inadvertently creates feelings of inadequacy and guilt.

A study conducted by Mokhtar (2020) indicated women in senior management positions in Malaysia were more vulnerable to experiencing role conflicts and a sense of guilt. While in Ladge and Little's study (2019), a good mother is portrayed as one who makes their career aspirations secondary to their mothering role and identity in the family, as they need to spend a considerable amount of time with their children.

Thus, accentuated by societal perceptions, working mothers have been criticized for spending too little quality time with their children or leaving children in someone else's care or not attending to most of the domestic chores. In their efforts to meet both work and family commitments, the constraints of available time in relation to their hectic schedule often make them feel insufficient and incapable.

Amid the dual pressures of work and caregiving, modern-day representation of a superwoman inherently assumes that an "ideal mother" is someone who can manage both her work and children equally well, but this is not often possible. Given the increasingly competitive view of childrearing in the discourse of motherhood, the scope of maternal obligations goes beyond the

sphere of raising great kids but expanded to “being an omnipotent educator”. This literally means, mothers are accountable for the success or failure of their children’s education (Gao & Li, 2021).

The practices in urban families particularly indicated a steep escalation in working mother’s obligations toward their children’s education as they need to shoulder the additional role of understanding the school syllabus, customize individualized learning routes, planning schedules as well as integrating other extracurricular activities. To respond to their children’s varied needs, they are expected to be intellectually competent to be able to provide an optimal condition for raising well-rounded children who thrive not only academically but also physically, mentally, and emotionally (Derndorfer et al., 2021).

Yet, at the receiving end of unrealistic expectations, working mothers are often frazzled at the constant need to multitask, shuffling between career aspirations and family responsibilities at home (Forbes et.al., 2020). The constant comparison with idealized images on social media makes them feel they are not good enough (Tate, 2023). While the prescribed roles imposed leave them feeling inadequate, the never-ending tug of war with time and energy also makes them experience greater role conflict when undertaking multiple demands. While some feel frustrated and encumbered by family demands, some other deem their work demands preclude them from performing familial responsibilities (Lim, 2019). Somehow, in an effort to be a “superwoman”, they

begin to lose sight of what makes up their PWB (Sharma & Dhir, 2019).

Some working mothers even perceive their maternal role as one of drudgery and constantly beat themselves up for perceived failure (Berger, 2020). The challenges encountered are great given the physical toll of motherhood surrounding childcare, familial obligations, and home making. At its core, can working mothers raise great kids while they themselves are overwhelmed and their emotional needs are left unaddressed?

2.4 Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are cognitive and behavioral efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). With regards to the challenges faced, having to manage multiple roles on a daily basis, if working mothers are unable to find and develop various forms of coping strategies as a means of balancing motherhood and career, it will have a deleterious impact on their mental health and PWB. For example, when faced with a tight deadline at work, they may set priorities, tune out distractions, or break the project down into manageable chunks to be better at stress. As illustrated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Besides, support and help from family members and domestic assistants can also be some useful coping methods for working mothers to deal with their challenges.

2.4.1 Emotion-focused Coping

Emotion-focused coping is illustrated in Lazarus and Folkman's theory. It is likely to be utilised when individuals perceive a situation to be unavoidable and uncontrollable (Carver, 1998). To effectively manage negative emotions, emotion-focused coping is aimed at regulating reactively one's emotions in the face of a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This coping strategy seems to be common for some participants when it comes to handling work issues. In a study conducted by Rahman et al. (2016) (hereinafter referred to as "said study") on work challenges and coping strategies of professional and managerial dual-earner couples in Malaysia, one of the participants voiced her opinion. The following quotes reflect this point: "From the beginning I started to work, I have trained myself that, when I am at home, I am absolutely for the family....so it's like that from the start, I don't bring my problem to home.... I try to control."

Another example from a female participant was: "When I started working, I think my priority was more to my career. But when I had children, I tried to balance everything and prioritize the thing that should be prioritized. Because we know that the children are our treasure...so we certainly give more priority to them. Before this, I was really into my work. But now I have family, so I never do that anymore." It is notable that after getting married and having children, it becomes crucial for this participant to maintain a good balance while

prioritizing her children.

2.4.2 Problem-focused Coping

Problem-focused coping is adopted when the individual appraises the situation as optimistic and controllable (Carver et al., 1989). It actively confronts the problem head-on and address the issue immediately. It includes analysing the problems or working on smaller chunks of work, to make it more manageable which can be tackled one at a time (Rahim, 2019).

In the family context, problem-focused strategy involves restructuring family roles to accommodate family demands (Rahim, 2019). Hiring a domestic helper can be a good option. As there's a wealth of information that has shown long working hours have detrimental effect on psychological wellbeing and work-life balance, to cope with the demands, particularly in time management and prioritizing tasks, opting to scale back from full-time to part time basis to accommodate family schedules can effectively integrate employment and family life.

2.4.3 Family Support

Insights gleaned from research has suggested that family support has positive consequences for reducing stress arising from mutual demands and mitigating work and family challenges. In other words, family support is

positively associated with integration of work and family roles (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Leung et al., 2019).

In the said study conducted by Rahman et al. (2016), some other respondents also said they used to share the things that happened in the workplace with their spouses. They found this a helpful way to de-stress because they are able to share their problems rather than carrying that burden alone, hence receiving emotional comfort or validation from their loved one. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that such ‘motivation’ triggers positive emotions among working mothers. Such positive emotions contribute to a better PWB.

2.4.4 Spousal Cooperation

The presence of spousal cooperation has helped working mothers deal with work demands, particularly during the pandemic. Gender gaps somewhat narrowed when the relative increase in childcare support from the fathers was higher (Craig & Churchill, 2020). It can be reasonably assumed that in the cases where the husband is supportive in sharing the wife’s household and domestic burden, it acts as a buffer to protect her from suffering high-stress levels.

With regard to this, a qualitative methodology has been utilized to explore the possible factors to explain the husband’s attitude towards sharing domestic duties. In the said study investigating the sample of 22 married women,

the researcher indicated that the spouse's education level plays a vital role in shaping his approach towards the wife's distress.

Apparently, well-educated, or professionally trained husbands are relatively more accommodating as they are more willing to share the household responsibilities with their wives. Another study participant whose husband is also in the same profession as her, she said, 'my husband tries not to schedule his classes when I am busy with important meetings with my students' (Rahman et al., 2016). This reflected the positive relationship between the working mother and her husband. Such a positive relationship contributes to a better PWB.

2.4.5 Internal Support from Parents or Parents-in-law

Proximity to or co-residence with elderly parents or parents-in-law offers great help to working mothers. They generally feel safer when they leave their children with their grandparents. The sense of security has facilitated them in making a significant difference in their overall work performance (Compton & Pollak, 2014). Being able to perform at work somehow triggers a sense of achievement among working mothers. Such a sense of achievement contributes to a better PWB.

In a sample of 22 married women in the said study carried out by Rahman et al. (2016), 17 were found to be co-residing with their in-laws. 75% of such women said that with the help of their in-laws, they managed to fulfil their professional commitments more efficiently. When they are able to meet their expectation at work, it gives them a sense of meaning, which contributes to better PWB.

2.4.6 Hiring Domestic Help

The said study also reflected that hiring domestic help had efficiently reduced the burden of daily household chores. As remarked by a female interviewee, with the maid's help, she can see the positive impact on her career. Before this, she felt more stressed having to attend to all the house chores by herself. She couldn't bring her work home because she couldn't do her work with the kids around. With the maid around now, her situation has improved. With the help of her maid caring for her children at home, she can focus more on her work and put in more commitment without having to worry about her children. When they can focus on their work, they tend to be more engaged, which contributes to better PWB. Subsequently, it can be observed that having a domestic helper contributes to the increased professional performance of working mothers (Rahman et al., 2016).

2.4.7 Coping Strategies in Different Cultural Contexts

As discussed in the significance of the study in Chapter 1, research on

the coping strategies adopted by working mothers in dealing with their daily demands in Malaysia remains scarce. Some researchers indicated the coping strategies adopted included positive reinterpretation, growth-oriented experience, seeking social support, proactive coping, religious coping, suppression of competitive activities and planning can be some of the options (Rajgariah et al., 2020). To a large extent, cultural context shapes the types of stressors that an individual is likely to experience and subsequently affects the choice of coping strategies that an individual utilizes in certain circumstances (Luong et al., 2020).

This resonates well with a study that compared the collectivist culture of Nigeria and the individualist culture of the British, where working mothers in these two countries adopt different coping strategies to deal with family and work demands (Mordi et al., 2023). Under the patriarchal society in Nigeria, women's roles have been culturally entrenched, where they are expected to perform all household chores in addition to work roles, with very little help from their husbands. Otherwise, they will be subjected to social sanctions.

A predominant coping strategy adopted by working mothers in Nigeria has been described as a 'help-seeking' coping method whereby grandmothers, relatives, friends, or neighbours are asked to help with childcare tasks and other domestic affairs. Some of them also engaged housekeepers or brought in less privileged relatives from rural areas to help them (Adisa et al., 2016).

In Britain, however, registered childcare centres are provided by employers to support working mothers. This has been deemed as one of the most effective coping strategies for working mothers in managing multiple roles. Different work-family programmes such as extended maternity leave, emergency childcare leave, family medical leave, flexible working hours, reduced working hours and working from home are also available (Adisa et.al, 2016).

To sum up, the coping strategies as mentioned above can be integrated and applied by working mothers in managing their multiple roles in both domains. However, there is no one universal coping strategy that works in all situations. Due to individual differences or demands in different situations, people differ in how they construe what is challenging and stressful to them and their options for coping. Some coping strategies may facilitate, and some may impede in different situations. Whether preventive measures are to be taken, or regulating emotional distress is necessary, working mothers will have to consider the specific situation and their respective goals prior to drawing any conclusions as to which coping strategy is the most effective.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in Chapter 1, my research objectives are to examine working mothers' challenges when balancing roles between work and family, to identify the coping strategies adopted when balancing the roles in both work and

family domains; as well as to examine whether the coping strategies employed contributed to working mothers' PWB. As illustrated in the problem statement, working mothers from all over the world often feel overwhelmed and exhausted due to the challenges faced, which include cultural perceptions and social expectations of gender differences, workplace discrimination as well as motherhood myth, which in turn propel them to shoulder myriads of responsibilities. As such, it is of paramount importance to develop essential coping strategies so they would feel prosperous again.

In light of this, to answer my research questions as stated in Chapter 1, the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC) and PERMA model of wellbeing have been chosen to approach a feasible solution to the research problem and challenges faced by working mothers.

2.5.1 Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC)

TTSC is developed by Dr. Richard Lazarus and Dr. Susan Folkman. This theory evaluates how significant life events and daily affairs affect human emotions. Both researchers posited stress to be a product of interactions between a person and their environment. Consequently, the experience of stress and the reaction to stress, is largely associated with personalities traits and social influence (Lazarus & Folkman,1984). This literally means, each person assesses and perceives stress differently.

2.5.1.1 Three Levels of Evaluation for Stress Assessment.

A situation can be judged as positive for party A, while it can be deemed irrelevant for party B, whereas for party C, it is potentially dangerous. The level of emotional stress they are experiencing is different. When we deal with stress, the multiple systems within us that involves the cognitive system, physiological state, affective system, psychological system, and the neurological system varies from each other.

Primarily, this theory is concerned with individuals' thoughts and evaluation of the significance of what is happening, and it subsequently demands working mothers' efforts to manage the issues they face. With reference to what TTSC theory has suggested, as mentioned above, each person assesses and perceives stress differently. According to Lazarus, there are 3 different levels of evaluation for the stress assessment. When a situation is considered stressful by working mothers, assessment takes place on different levels.

1. Level 1: Primary appraisal - In the case of working mothers, if a situation is considered stressful, assessment will take place.
2. Level 2: Secondary assessment - In this level, the purpose is to determine whether a specific situation can be managed with the available resources. It could be a social resource where working mothers gain support from

family members, domestic assistants, or colleagues at work in alleviating their burden in the relevant domains. It could also be psychological resources where working mothers build resilience by adapting to stressful situations and emerging stronger. (More has been depicted in Figure 2.2 below). When sufficient resources are available, working mothers are able to deal with the daily demands more efficiently.

3. Level 3: Reassessment - TTSC theory has posited that a coping strategy would depend on the situation and the person's characteristics. When working mothers evaluate the success or failure of certain coping outcomes, they learn to selectively apply different strategies. Hence, the third level is aimed to assess the success of the coping strategy employed in order to facilitate adaptation to the situation faced by working mothers. If addressed properly, the challenges will be resolved.

2.5.1.2 Three Types of Stress Management. Besides three levels of evaluation for the stress assessment as discussed above, TTSC theory also suggests three types of stress management that include dealing with stress by way of problem-oriented, dealing with stress by way of emotion-oriented as well as dealing with stress in an assessment-oriented manner.

In the case of working mothers, if they regard ‘hectic schedule’ and ‘insufficient time’ as the challenges that bother them the most, they will have to find various forms of coping strategies, whether to seek support from relevant parties or to build self-resilience in order to deal with specific demands.

To elaborate further, when working mother controls or adapts to a problematic situation by seeking help or taking certain action, this is how stress is dealt in a problem-oriented way. For instance, when they are overwhelmed by tight work deadlines and nurturing tasks, they can hire a domestic assistant to help with house chores and get their husband’s help to take care of the child/ children while they are tied up with work. This is how she deals with her stress by way of problem-oriented.

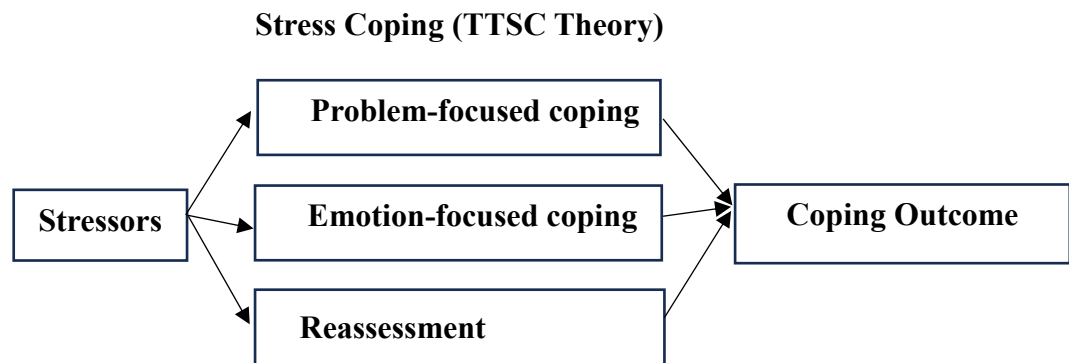
When they reduce their emotional upsets by managing the demands caused by stressful situations, this is how stress is dealt with in an emotion-oriented or action-oriented way. For instance, when they are feeling burned out and emotionally drained, they practice yoga or meditation to mentally check out from stress. This is how they co-regulate their emotions by way of emotion-oriented.

When they reassess the situation that they are facing, their emotion and level of stress can be different. For instance, when they assess their stress level

after the first meditation, they find they are still stressed. The second time after the meditation, they reassess their level of stress and feel slightly calmer. This is how their stress is dealt with in an assessment-oriented way.

Figure 2.1

Theoretical Framework of the study



From Figure 2.1, stressors refer to working mother's challenges in the work or family domain. In view of the challenges faced, they will employ certain coping strategies either by way of problem-oriented or emotion oriented, whichever they find works for them. To check their coping outcome, they will reassess their stress level after coping strategies are adopted. From there, they will be able to know whether their PWB is improved or otherwise.

2.5.2 PERMA Theory of Wellbeing

As reiterated, my study is focused on the challenges that working mothers encountered, the coping strategies they employed as well as their PWB. Given that individual coping style directly contributed to the maintenance or restoration of one's PWB, therefore, based on such theoretical considerations, it is aimed that the coping strategies employed by the working mothers can effectively support their PWB in face of stress, besides garnering support from their family and the workplace. Following this, PERMA model of well-being developed by Martin Seligman is used to explore 'How is working mothers' PWB after the coping strategies are employed?' (My RQ 3).

Basically, this PERMA model lays out the building blocks for a life of profound fulfilment, thereby developing reservoir of psychological strengths that enables individuals to live well and be resilient in the face of life's challenges. PERMA model is premised on positive psychology that promotes and creates well-being (Rusk & Waters, 2014). It outlines the characteristics of a flourishing individual through five key pillars as seen below (Seligman, 2011).

- 1. Positive Emotions.** Positive emotions are fundamental to an individual's well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Such positive emotions are not only about feeling happy and contented, but also about being engaged and confident. According to the researcher, human brains are hard-wired for negativity as they are prone to look out for dangers and threats (Hanson

et al., 2021). When working mothers are being bombarded by stress, a minor problem may be perceived as being far worse than it actually is. For every negative emotional experience encountered, one person needs to have at least three positive emotional experiences which are uplifting (Fredrickson, 1998). A study conducted by the academic Emily Heaphy and the consultant Marcial Losada indicated that the most successful work teams had a ratio of positive to negative comments at 6-to-1, whereas the low performing work teams had a ratio of 3-to-1 (Zenger & Folkman, 2013). This shows how powerful the impact of positive emotion is on one's success, be it personally or professionally.

In order to off-set the negativity bias and tune out negative thoughts, Barbara Frederickson outlines how positive emotions broaden and build a person's psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). In working mother's context, it enhances the positives and allows them to find meaning in the negative experiences and expand the number of possibilities they see. As such, when they consider more options for creative problem-solving, they will be able to savour moments in the present, reframe thoughts, and remain confident in the face of challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). Hence, focusing on positive emotions is a crucial building block of sustainable happiness. Positive emotions help working mothers to stay resilient in the face of challenges, which is important for stress management.

2. **Engagement.** This aspect owes a lot to the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his concept of “flow”. According to him, engagement leads to “flow”, which is a state of being completely enthralled in a task. Everyone will have different means of achieving flow. If working mothers are able to deploy their skills, strengths, and attention for a challenging task, they will have such a ‘flow’ experience. It means they fully immerse in an activity to such an extent that they completely involved in what they are doing and become less aware of themselves and their problems. Time slips unnoticeably, and they tend to apply the best part of themselves in a manner that brings a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

3. **(Positive) Relationships.** Personal well-being is often amplified through positive relationships with others. Human beings are social creatures that are built to belong. They crave connection. High-quality connections give life purpose and meaning, consequently leading to upward positive spirals and energizing individuals as well as organizations (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Having a social support system has been shown to be profoundly beneficial in times of stress (Scott, 2020). For working mothers, cultivating meaningful connections helps them experience pleasure as they feel supported. The burden of their problems is relieved or lightened when they have people with whom they can share, hence feel seen, heard, understood, and cared for. When their PWB is enhanced through interactions with others, they also positively impact their circle of family

and friends through acts of kindness, compassion, and thoughtfulness. Hence, fostering positive relationships and an inviting work environment will eventually result in a happy and productive workforce.

4. Meaning. People intrinsically seek to have a sense of meaning in their lives, which gives them motivation and purpose in the things they do. Meaning gives life its deepest significance, and it varies from person to person. Some find meaning in personal pursuits and endeavours, while some may want to grow in their talents and strengths, which can be in their professional life (Steger et al., 2008). For instance, some working mothers find raising children to be meaningful while some other working mothers find building a career a lifelong mission. Those who find meaning in their work will be focused on controlling positive work outcomes (Bailey & Madden, 2016). Having meaning in life is an integral part of PWB.

5. Accomplishment. Madson (2017) defined accomplishments as the pursuit of competence and mastery. It involves grit, resilience, a sense of self-efficacy and the ability to reach set goals. Being able to have a sense of accomplishment is important for working mothers, as it not only creates a sense of competence, but serves as a powerful buffer of stress, having found personal and professional satisfaction and confidence in the multiple roles.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical perspective and my research questions as discussed, I aim to examine whether the coping strategies employed by working mothers impact their PWB. If the coping strategies adopted work for them, that literally means they experience the elements in the PERMA model of wellbeing as explained, so, their PWB will be well-supported.

2.6.1 Challenges

The diversity of economic environment, education system, cultural background or employment practices are key elements contributing to the difficulties faced by working mothers in their respective workplaces. Studies found working women experience higher levels of stress than men as they have been endowed with greater demands in executing day-to-day routines such as childrearing, managing a household while monitoring performance and complying with the organization's needs (Clark et al., 2021). In line with this, research showed that women managers report considerably greater stress, higher mental and physical burden than their male counterparts, while not receiving sufficient organizational and social support (Qiu et al., 2020)

2.6.2 Coping Strategies to Move Towards a Better PWB

Work-family conflicts are a source of stress which is closely associated with negative experiences of emotional and physical ill-health (Zhou et al., 2018). Torn in a rift between passion and obligation, working mothers multitask

in an effort to divide time between their personal and professional lives. Even when they have little time, they would rather sleep or rest instead of investing time in hobbies for pleasure. They constantly struggling as there is an underlying conflict between their needs (sleep and rest to regain energy to attend to work and family demands) and wants (engage in their favorite hobbies or activities for pleasure, a better sense of meaning or sense of accomplishment).

Somehow, the coexistence of both traditional and modern gender norms in Malaysia results in differences and tensions in the midst of the economic transition of greater female participation in the workforce. Considering these, factors such as policies, regulations, cultural practices, and demographic status contribute to shaping motherhood and gender roles (International Labour Organization, 2020). Hence, to pave the way to a better PWB, besides the coping strategies mentioned above, organizational culture and leadership indeed, play a central role in complementing, strengthening, and enhancing policies which will stimulate transformative change within societies and facilitate working mothers' uninterrupted continuation of their careers (Wingard, 2020). With these, both the personal growth and professional development of the working mothers can be well-supported.

2.6.3 *Working Mother's PWB*

PWB influences and covers other aspects of a person's life. An improved sense of well-being makes working mothers more present and more focused at

home and at work which ultimately leads to improved productivity. If they are able to manage the family role effectively, they will certainly dedicate time and effort towards work. In other words, it starts with a thriving individual who grows outward to support the collective flourishing of the entire family as well as the workplace (Anwar et al., 2017).

PWB results in individuals that are happy (Gragano et.al., 2020). With respect to mothering, the key for them to bring their best at what they do is to take care of their PWB the way they take care of their physical health through the conscious choices made on a daily basis. More often than not, the increase of positive emotional development of children is more likely to be influenced by the psychological prosperity of their mothers (Gao & Li, 2021). While in an Asian context, it is even more obvious that being a mother seems to be an eternal responsibility. It not only involves being a carer and protector, a guide and a friend, an educator, but also a disciplinarian of her children. Hence, the PWB of working mothers needs to be cared for and maintained for the greater good.

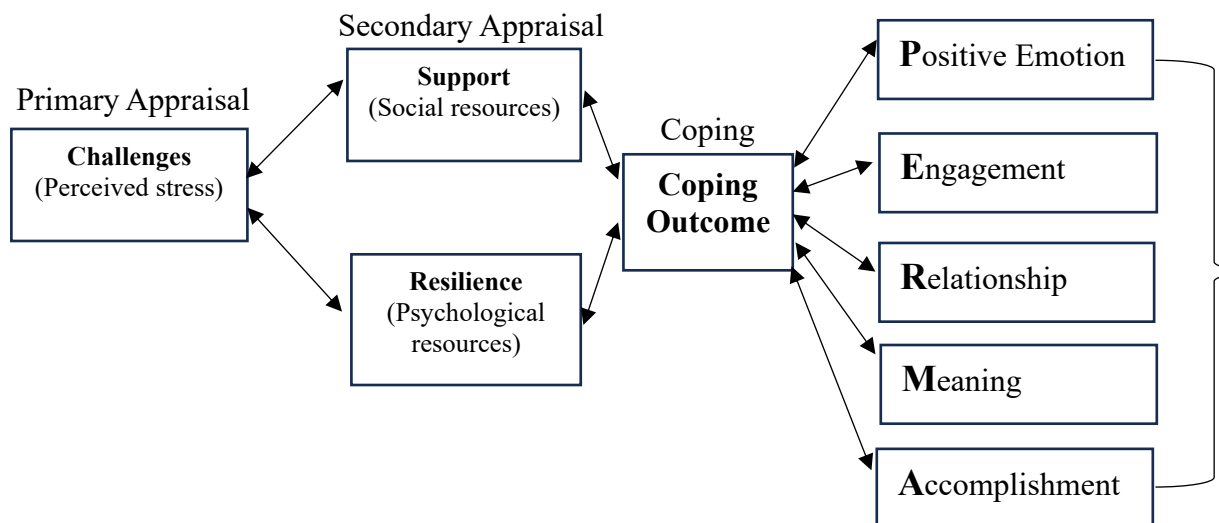
For instance, when working mothers work on a valued goal, they feel meaningful (**M**) as engaged in the task brings them to the flow state (**E**). When they reach their goal, it brings them a sense of pride and a sense of accomplishment (**A**), which will ultimately trigger positive emotions (**P**). Positive emotions allow them to form tighter bonds with others, that's where good relationship is established (**R**). These five core elements in PERMA would serve

as a tool to guide working mothers through the way of creating a happy workforce and pursuing a meaningful and joyful family life.

As such, constantly reflecting upon the core elements of PERMA will go a long way in supporting and sustaining their PWB. Working mothers, as they set themselves up to weather the storms in life more readily as well as to enjoy the blessings and rewards in life, they will feel happier, more confident, fulfilled, and connected; and hence, able to persevere through challenges. These are tantamount to a better PWB.

Figure 2.2

The Conceptual Framework on coping strategies and PWB of working mothers



2.7 Conclusion

By presenting in depth about working mothers' challenges, coping strategies and their PWB, we now have an idea why the PWB of working mothers are to be cared for and maintained. Working mothers who are in good psychological and emotional health will have optimal outcomes and better individual performance at work, better self-regulation and stress management and higher life satisfaction (Maccoby, 2020).

Thus, that is the reason why working mothers' PWB is of importance, not simply because of themselves as individuals but also because of the related wellbeing of their family members that include the future generation as well as for the overall good of the organization they work with. That is the greater good that I am aiming at. Besides their workplace success and personal wellbeing, working mothers can also share their gifts by cultivating their children's strengths, grit, and resilience, which will eventually energize a cycle of wellbeing that is good for all. That's where the higher goal lies. With that in mind, Chapter 3 will dive into what I have seen, heard, and encountered in one-on-one interviews with my participants to further explore deeper insights into real-world situations.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter gives an outline of methods that was used in undertaking the study as well as the description of the entire research process. Basically, it is divided into four main sections. It first started with the research paradigm, research approach, research design and research instrument that have been chosen for the study as well as the justification of the choice made. Secondly, it expounded on the sampling plan that includes sampling method, inclusion criteria, sampling size and ethical consideration. Thereafter, it followed by the processes of data collection, pilot study and data analysis that include the procedures and steps taken in gathering and analyzing data in detail. The Chapter then ends with the strategies taken to ensure reliability and credibility, data triangulation, as well as my role as a researcher in relation to reflexivity.

3.1 Research Paradigm

3.1.1 Social Constructivist

As mentioned earlier, my study is to explore the challenges faced by working mothers. The interaction between the participants in my study and I, being the researcher is consisted of conversation where real-life experiences were shared and multiple truths were investigated. Fundamentally, individuals'

own backgrounds shape their interpretation, which inherently flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences. As they develop meanings that corresponds with their lived reality through a subjective lens, that will usually lead the researchers to make sense of the interpreted and varied meanings they have about the world.

As Creswell (2013) posits that social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world and the specific contexts in which they live and work, the researcher aimed to explicitly deal with participants' personal subjectivity throughout the investigative process. In light of this, I have decided to adapt social constructivist view in the study so I can better deal with participants' personal subjectivity throughout the research process in order to answer my research questions.

So, the interview questions have been designed in a way that are broad and open-ended, in order to enable the participants to construct the meaning of challenges of the situation faced, while keeping in mind the subjective meanings interpreted are negotiated socially (Merriam, 2009). In other words, they are not imprinted on individuals, but rather, formed through interaction with others as well as through cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives.

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Selection of Qualitative Research and Its Justification

According to Creswell, the researchers handled information which inextricably tie in with human senses and subjectivity, qualitative technique has been adopted, as it provides an opportunity to attain a greater level of depth to reveal the participants' perceptions and feelings regarding a subject matter (Creswell, 2013). With this in mind, the use of open-ended responses and the qualitative analysis would enable me to explore further on what are the challenges that working mothers are encountering when balancing roles in both work and family domains, their coping strategies as well as the impact of coping towards their PWB. Such an exploratory study usually resembled an open conversation for the participants to express their views, which could be significantly hard in quantitative research.

Qualitative methodology provides rich and detailed descriptions of human behaviour in the real-world contexts in which it occurs; enables asking broader questions, collecting more detailed data, and drawing common themes from the analysis of those in-depth experiences (Asper & Corte, 2019).

Considering the challenges that each working mothers faced may be different from each other, the entirety, or aspects of someone's challenge may not happen to another person. Likewise, each person assesses a situation differently (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As mentioned in Chapter 2, a situation

can be judged as positive for someone, but it can be potentially challenging or even imminently threatening for someone else. This will subsequently influence the decisions for coping strategies too. Hence, due to the subjective and flexible operation of qualitative approach, I have opted to employ qualitative approach in my study.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 In-depth Case Study

Case study is one of the frequently used methodologies in qualitative research (Yazan, 2015). As my exploratory study is meant to investigate and tackle a problem, which is the challenges faced by the working mothers, this approach hence enables me to conduct an in-depth exploration of the intricate phenomena within such specific context. Aligned with a study conducted by Edgecastcdn (2022) that described case study is usually used when there is no single set of outcomes, and it intends to answer ‘How’ and ‘What.’ So, my study that aims to examine the challenges faced by the participants hence adopted case study to investigate all the aspects of such phenomenon.

To elaborate this, as illustrated in the Significance of Study under Chapter 1, given that limited pre-existing knowledge and prior research have been done pertaining to the challenges, coping strategies, and the PWB of this group of mothers specifically in the Malaysian context, there is virtually too little information about the subject matter to be understood. Such research design thus

become a good option for me to answer ‘what’ are the coping strategies employed and ‘how’ is participants’ PWB after the coping strategies are employed.

Besides, in case study, a real-time phenomenon is explored within its naturally occurring context, with the consideration that context will create a difference (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). So, for my study, considering issue faced by this group of working mothers was yet to be resolved, therefore, case study allows me to gather in-depth information directly from the working mothers (the research subject) through in-depth interview with them. It provided good opportunity to explore more about their thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Moreover, better understanding and further insights can be gained from the participants that a generalized public source would not be able to provide.

So, after the main issue (in this case, the challenges) has been identified, it led to the coping strategies employed and subsequently the PWB of the participants. As reiterated, such exploratory case study is flexible and broad (Creswell, 2013). Hence, I was readily adapted to changes as my study progressed. In view of the goal of such study is to explore the problem and not actually to derive any conclusive evidence yet. Rather, it helps to generate a deeper understanding of the problem. At times, the revelation of data obtained, or insight might shed new light on my study.

Additionally, as reflected in Chapter 2, there are two theories used as a foundation to guide and support the findings. Case study hence made it easier for me to assess the issues and sail along, and eventually create an avenue for further research to find out more of the possible causes and solutions for the challenges faced by the participants. On a separate note, a study conducted by Mahamad et al. (2021) that examined similar scope and utilized qualitative research also adopted such exploratory approach.

3.4 Research Instrument

3.4.1 In-depth Interview with Semi-structured Open-ended Questions

An in-depth interview allows openness to new ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As I aimed at apprehending working mothers' perspectives in a detailed manner, in-depth interviews would allow me to assess participants' subjective experiences and challenges, as well as to gain insights about their coping strategies in face with the challenges. As mentioned, this is an exploratory study which is to investigate an issue. So, in-depth interviews would offer an exploratory perspective whereby I began with a general idea which was to explore the challenges faced by the participants, further identified the coping strategies applied; and subsequently, explored their PWB after the coping strategies are employed.

Next, as mentioned in RO 1, my study is aimed to examine the challenges faced by working mothers in balancing roles in both domains. So, to answer RQ 1, it required critical self-reflection among the participants. As for RO 2, my study aimed to give voice to the views of the participants for the coping strategies they employed in face of the challenges. How do they manage various demands and stressful situations? Both positive and negative aspects of their experiences irrespective of the personal or professional levels would shed light on the dilemmas that go along while managing their multiple roles and responsibilities. Keeping that in mind, after examining the issues through the experiences shared by the participants in my study, I would work to come up with a detailed account to be presented in Chapter 4.

Therefore, before an in-depth interview was scheduled for each participant, semi-structured open-ended questions were crafted. To increase the effectiveness of the interview questions and ensure its significance to achieve respective Research Objective 1, 2, and 3 of the study, I would focus on ensuring the interview questions are constructed in order to answer my research questions. (Majid et al., 2017). As such, I have formulated 17 key questions based on my research questions and sent for expert to review the language and wording used; the appropriateness as well as the relevance. Understand that ethical approval has to be obtained before I could proceed to collect data, I went ahead to apply ethical clearance from UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee. As I have planned to divide the interview into 3 sessions i.e. Session A, B and C, below are the interview questions which have been sent for approval.

Table 3.1

Interview questions allocated in each session

Session	Interview Questions
Session A: (Introductory) To provide initial knowledge to the participants.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you perceive your role as a working mother?2. What kind of expectation your work has on you?3. What kind of expectation your Family has on you?
Session B (i) (Exploration) To answer RQ 1: What are the challenges working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family life?	<p>Before marriage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. How's your life before marriage?5. How's your work life before marriage? <p>After marriage, before having children</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. How's your family life before having children?7. How's your work life before having children? <p>After marriage and having children</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. How's your family life after having children?9. How's your work life after having children?

Session**Interview Questions**

**Session B (ii)
(Understanding)**

To answer RQ 2:
What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges in both work and family domains?

10. What are the challenges you face in handling work and home responsibilities?

11. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed?

12. How do you manage the challenges you face as a working mother?

13. How did you balance your roles between work and family?

**Session C: Contemplation/
Reflection**

To answer RQ 3:
How did the coping strategies impact working mother's PWB?

14. In your opinion, what contributes to your PWB?

15. On a scale from 1-10, how would you describe your current PWB condition?

16. Has the way you managed the challenge (in Q10), sufficient to help you cope with your roles?

17. On a scale from 1 (very poorly) – 10 (very well), how would you rate your PWB after you applied the ways (coping strategies) that you mentioned?

3.4.2 Interview Protocol Design

3.4.2.1 Session A: Introductory. As described, the interview is divided into 3 sessions. Session A represents an introductory stage where it is aimed to provide initial knowledge to the participants for ice breaking and rapport building purposes. Hence, I started the session by introducing myself, briefing on description and general rules. I also conveyed the purpose of the study and communicated expectations to motivate the participants to be participative. Then, participants introduced themselves. As I have collected the information sheet pertaining to participant's demographic profile prior to the interview, I went through briefly with the participant for confirmation purposes; and proceeded with relevant interview questions to obtain participants' background information.

3.4.2.2 Session B: Exploration and Understanding. Session B is an exploration stage where it is aimed to answer RQ 1 as stated. In this session, participants were required to identify the challenges they faced in balancing roles at work and family. They compared their family life and work life before and after marriage and having children. Participants identified the challenges and problems experienced in handling their multiple roles being a mother, a wife, and an employee. Then, the participants were invited to speak about their problems, the expectations of work and their families. For instance, they explored more about their life being a working mother and described their work life and family life before marriage and having children, after marriage (before having children) and after marriage and having children.

While in understanding stage, it was meant to understand more on the coping strategies part so RQ 2 can be answered. So, participants were encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts in this process. As parties proceeded further, I expected a more in-depth discussion as I aimed to explore their coping strategies in face of the challenges as mentioned.

3.4.2.3 Session C: Contemplation/ Reflection. Session D is a contemplation or reflection stage where participants were required to explore their respective PWB condition and reflected on whether the coping strategies employed towards their PWB.

3.5 Sampling Plan

3.5.1 Purposive Sampling As Sampling Method

While waiting for the approval from the expert, understand that ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee must be obtained before the research commences, I then proceeded with the application from UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee (more has been described under 3.6.). At the meantime, I deliberated on matters such as selection of the sampling method and determination of sample size. Given that my research question is addressed to a particular interest group, which is the working mothers in the Klang Valley of Malaysia. I decided to adopt purposive sampling in my study. As McCombes (2019) posited that non-probability sampling techniques are often used in exploratory and qualitative research, I supposed such purposive sampling

would be decent for my study.

3.5.2 Inclusion Criteria of the Participants

More often than not, within qualitative research choice of research participants, it is invariably constrained by what is practicable. Whilst in an ideal world, to collect data from participants in a particular group, they are largely dependent upon gaining access to the intended participants, as well as being granted permission to collect the data required. The inclusion criteria here depicted the characteristics that described the boundaries of the study including sample size, population traits, demographic characteristics, geographical location and setting in which the study took place. Cases that fulfilled the following criteria have been selected for the interview.

1. Working mothers in Klang Valley, Malaysia aged 25-54 years old
2. Full-time employment.
3. Stay in the same house with husband and child/children.
4. Play domestic and childcare roles.

The findings from the survey carried out by TheEdgeProperty.com-Lafarge Happiness in the City Index from April 28 to May 28, 2017, has identified a need for me to focus on the working mothers in these areas. The survey covers Klang Valley, Penang and Johor Bahru found that 54% of

Klang Valley respondents felt stressed out living in the city compared with only 7% and 17% Penang and Johor Bahru respondents, respectively (*Stress and the City*, 2017).

Full-time working mothers who have domestic and childcare roles tend to have higher levels of stress. Consistent with the findings from a study carried out by Rose (2017), it shows that this group of mothers endure significant time pressure related to time poverty (insufficient time for necessary or discretionary activities), time intensity (multitasking and merging work and home boundaries) and time density (familial emotion and organization work). While age group that recorded the highest female LFPR was 25 to 34 years (75.5%), followed by 35 to 44 years (73.2%) and 45 to 54 years (57.0%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2022)

3.5.3 *Sampling Size*

A sample size of 5 is proposed. This number is consistent with Creswell's assertion that an ideal sample size should be between 5 to 25 (Creswell, 2013). I initially targeted a sample size of five. Though the number of participant count is low, but richer data can be extracted. I aimed to continue the data collection until saturation point is achieved which is in line with the requirement that saturation point is attained (Saunders et al., 2014). Which means, I had to ensure saturation is achieved to further determine the ultimate qualitative sample size (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

3.6 Ethical Consideration

After the sampling plan was specified, the ethical approval for my study was obtained from the Scientific and Ethical Review Committee of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). The title, objectives, location of the study as well as the specific outcomes and expected contribution have been stated herein. A copy of the approval letter dated 8 July 2022 is attached in Appendix A. As mentioned in the letter, the conduct of this study is subject to the participants' informed consent and the confidentiality of their personal data must be maintained. Hence, prior to the commencement of my study, these issues have been observed.

3.6.1 Consent Form

Considering the research participation for the present study is entirely voluntary, Basically, there are two ways of informing and obtaining participant consent: written explanations and verbal explanations (Health Research Authority, 2020). I have done both. In this study, the consent form contained my identity which include my name, my contact information, the organization I am attached to, the purpose of my study, the interview topic, participants' voluntary participation, their consent towards recording, as well their data's privacy and confidentiality.

3.6.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

As ethics remained the top priority throughout my study, I have done my

best to protect the participants' right to anonymity. To maintain the ethical principle of privacy and confidentiality, the participants' names will be kept confidential (Novak, 2014). So, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants in my study. For instance, the two participants in my pilot study were referred to as P1 and P2 while another 5 participants in my main study were referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5. Their demographic information including age, ethnicity, and qualification and other related information have been treated as strictly private and confidential. The information shared by the participants on professionalism and motherhood, their challenges, coping strategies, and other related issues was strictly used for the academic purpose of data analysis and interpretation only.

3.7 Sampling Recruitment

After obtaining the ethical clearance from UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee as well as the approval from the expert in regards of the interview questions formulated, I started to recruit participants through my personal and professional network connections for data collection purposes. I sourced and reached out to the participants, then briefed them informally about the issues of the study. From there, I wanted to test whether the participants possess appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and whether they will be able to provide the most relevant information. However, the majority turned down the request when they knew that the entire interview session will be recorded.

I then further requested the first round of potential participants to recommend their friends or colleagues who may be interested in joining the study. Those participants who personally know me or those who were referred by their friends were more willing to be interviewed and appeared to be more participative. That indeed useful and helpful for me to gain access to the community I was seeking for.

3.8 Data Collection By Way of Online Interview

When I started my data collection, that was few months after the announcement of relaxation of Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) by the government. Even so, I was still unable to meet the participants in person. All the participants who were agreeable to be interviewed were not willing to meet physically. They preferred to have online interviews. They explained how online interview would help save time amidst their hectic schedule and multiple roles working from home. Additionally, some of them mentioned that they have colleagues and friends who contracted Covid, it was still worrisome, and disconcerting and they wanted to take extra precautions to avoid unnecessary risks. Furthermore, some participants also stated that they feel more comfortable with online interview as they can remain in their preferred safe environment (Hanna, 2012). Hence, all participants who had agreed to be interviewed in both pilot study and main study were interviewed through Zoom.

3.8.1 *The Flow of the Interview*

Basically, there are three phases of the interview process which is described in table 3.2.

Table 3.2

The Flow of the Interview

Phase	Steps
Pre-interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I got ready my interview protocol design, interview questions and consent forms.2. I drafted research recruitment email, listed out potential participants from my personal and professional network and started recruiting the participants.3. I scheduled the interview date and time with participants who agreed to be interviewed.4. I explained the terms and conditions as stated in the consent form and informed the participants that the interview would be recorded. I also explained to them that they have the right to withdraw from participation at any point of time.5. I attached the information sheet containing basic Information and demographic profile such as participants' age, relationship status, current occupation etc. for the participants to fill up prior to the interview.6. I extended a copy of consent form/ ethical agreement illustrating the ethics of privacy and confidentiality involved in the study for participants who were agreeable to the terms and conditions and consented to participate in my study.7. Participants signed the documents and sent it back for my safe keeping prior to the interview.
During the interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I reminded the participant that the interview would be recorded for academic purposes in order to aid in the data collection in the later part.2. Relevant information about the study, purpose, procedure, and data usage were made clear again to the participants. None of them decided to withdraw from the study.

Phase	Steps
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="692 376 1401 517">3. Things went well as I strived to build rapport with them to foster trust. As it progressed, I asked the interview questions and took down notes where necessary. <li data-bbox="692 562 1401 667">4. Some follow-up questions have been asked to gain a deeper understanding and perspective of the participants' viewpoints. <li data-bbox="692 712 1401 891">5. All participants were cooperative and the interview sessions went well. They had their cameras turned on throughout the interview sessions. That indeed allowed for face-to-face interaction and the gauging of sentiments through their expressions. <li data-bbox="692 936 1401 1108">6. They positioned themselves, so they are squarely in the middle of the frame. Even though I have not physically proximated to them, but the video conferencing platform has managed to maintain the face-to-face element of interviewing.
Post-interview	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="692 1182 1401 1256">1. After the interview, I started to transcribe the data from the spoken text to written form for analysis. <li data-bbox="692 1294 1401 1368">2. I sent the transcription to the participants for their confirmation via email. <li data-bbox="692 1406 1401 1480">3. At times, I sought further clarification when necessary. <li data-bbox="692 1518 1401 1592">4. Upon confirmation, I proceeded with data interpretation <li data-bbox="692 1630 1401 1697">5. I sent 'thank you' card and a box of flower tea to all the participants as a token of appreciation.

3.9 Pilot Study

Before I embarked on my main study, pilot study which represents a miniature version of a larger-scale study has been conducted to test whether all my research questions were answered before implementing it fully across my main study. Pursuant to Seidman (1998)'s suggestion that researchers can build a pilot venture to test their research design and gauge practicalities, a pilot test can essentially guide the development of the research plan (Prescott and Soeken, 1989). Such a trial run of the planned methods can help improve the practicality of the interview protocol. So, in pilot interviews, it was suggested that the participants should share as many similar criteria as possible to the group of participants for the present study (Majid et al., 2017). Likewise, Hennink et al. (2011) also share similar notion. Thus, pilot study is important not only to evaluate the validity and the appropriateness of the interview questions, but also provide me with some constructive suggestions on the viability of the research.

3.9.1 Piloting for Interviews

Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggest that building a good rapport with the participants could facilitate better responses. Pilot study is carried out to pave the way for the full-scale study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Having to validate interview questions, as the pilot study progresses, the quality of the interview gets improved too. In addition, Krauss et al. (2009) noted that the interview guide needs to be adjusted accordingly before embarking on the main study.

Through the pilot study, besides having to address potential practical issues in trying out the interview questions, it can also help me to identify the limitations within the interview design (if any) as well as the necessary modifications required. With that in mind, I learned about what is lacking, which key area that needs to be focused and what can be improved in order to have a smoother flow for the interview in major study. Hence, I recruited two participants based on purposive sampling to conduct the pilot work. Besides building rapport with the participants to ensure the flow of conversation, I also endeavored to gain practice in harnessing useful interview skills throughout the interview sessions.

Table 3.3

Demographic Background of the Participants in Selangor

Participant	Age	No & Age of Child/Children	Job Title	Weekly Work Hours	Years of incorporating work & family roles
P1	36	2, Age 6 & 12	Teacher	40	15
P2	35	2, Age 4 & 10	Teacher	40	12

3.9.2 Procedure of the Pilot Study

Similar like what has been described under the interview flow in table 3.2, I explained to the participants pertaining to the research title, research objective, the interview questions, as well as the procedures of the interview. Informed consent forms were obtained prior to the interview. Upon agreement,

I scheduled the interview date and time with them. Each interview was conducted in English, with a duration of 27 minutes and 32 minutes respectively. Both sessions have been recorded with permission.

During the interview, I focused on the exploration of values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, feelings, and characteristic of the participants. It resembled an open conversation to encourage the participants to express their views. Throughout the session, I observed the dynamics of the participants when they answered the questions and shared their feelings and thoughts. Significant facial expression, gestures, sitting styles and other body languages have been documented.

Considering that observation is important for noting any phenomena that arises the data collection can vary along with the observations. For instance, it can often yield interesting results that can later be used to further refine the research outcome through thematic analysis. After completing the pilot interviews, I emailed the transcriptions for both participants' confirmation. Upon confirmation, the transcriptions have been coded using thematic analysis technique.

3.9.3 Analysis After Pilot Study

Upon analysis, I identified a number of issues. Firstly, my interview questions were found to be too broad for the participants. Those questions did not seem to allow the participants to reflect on the nature and essence of their experiences relating to the interview topic. In short, RQ was not answered, and RO was barely achieved.

As I divided the interview into 3 sessions as described under table 3.1, it turned out to be a little too overwhelming for the participants. It further led to poorer data collection. To adequately capture the depth and nuances of the attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and motives of the participants, I decided to simplify the process in the main study by deleting all these differentiated sessions.

Secondly, the participants were found to be slightly uncomfortable with the video recording. They tend to share less during the interview compared to our small talks over the phone prior to the interview. In light of these, I realized that a researcher has to be comfortable with presenting herself in an appropriate manner first, then only can facilitate trust and research objective can be met. Parallel to this, Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicated that the success of qualitative studies depends primarily on the interpersonal skills of the researchers. Hill (2006) also posited that qualitative research must be guided in an appropriate manner, which requires continuous reflection about the role of the researchers.

With this in mind, I recognized that how I was positioned in relation to participants essentially shaped the research process. I learned to be consistent and conscious of my role of an inquirer; being non-judgmental, and neutral to avoid any bias in the analysis. Only when I became more comfortable, I would be able to notice the way the participants reacted subtly changed and they were willing to speak more openly.

Hence, after hearing the recorded interview as well as reviewing the transcriptions, I found that I need to tolerate pauses and avoid leading questions as the interview progresses. In other words, I need to be more open and receptive to listening to participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). At times, I also need to ask probing questions to explore areas of concern in a more dynamic, intuitive, and creative way in order to elicit richer data.

3.9.4 Justification of Such Improvement

Overall, such reflections have helped me in modifying the interview questions for my main study. The probing questions that I decided to have, are important for me to gain a more in-depth understanding particular issues or focusing on narrower areas of inquiry. For instance, as the session progresses, new questions or issues may arise from the replies and answers of the participants. As the discussions are freer flowing, the participants might feel freer to communicate, identify and explore how they think and behave and further throw light on my research questions.

Hence, I have simplified the interview process but cutting down all three sessions described in Table 3.1. I deleted most of the interview questions and kept only 6 questions. Table 3.4 below shows the interview questions after the modification. Similarly, all 6 interview questions have been sent for expert's review and approval. The relevant content validation is attached in Appendix E. With these simplified questions, the entire interview process would become more manageable. I would also be able to explore values and perspectives, and understand about the participants' emotions, perceptions, and actions in depth.

Table 3.4

Interview Questions After Modification

Purpose	Modified Interview Questions
To answer my RQ 1: mother?	1. How do you perceive your role as a working
“What are the challenges balancing roles working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family?”	2. What kind of challenges do you face in between work and family? <i>Probing question: Can you elaborate more on the challenges that you mentioned?</i>
To answer my RQ 2:	3. How do you manage the challenges that you mentioned?
“What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges at both work and family domains?”	4. Are there any coping strategies that you used? <i>Probing question: Can you give some examples?</i>
To answer my RQ 3:	5. How do you perceive your work-life balance?
How is working mothers’ PWB after the coping strategies are employed?	6. Reflecting on the coping strategies that you mentioned in overcoming the challenges you faced, do you think it is sufficient?

3.9.5 Reflections on My Pilot Study

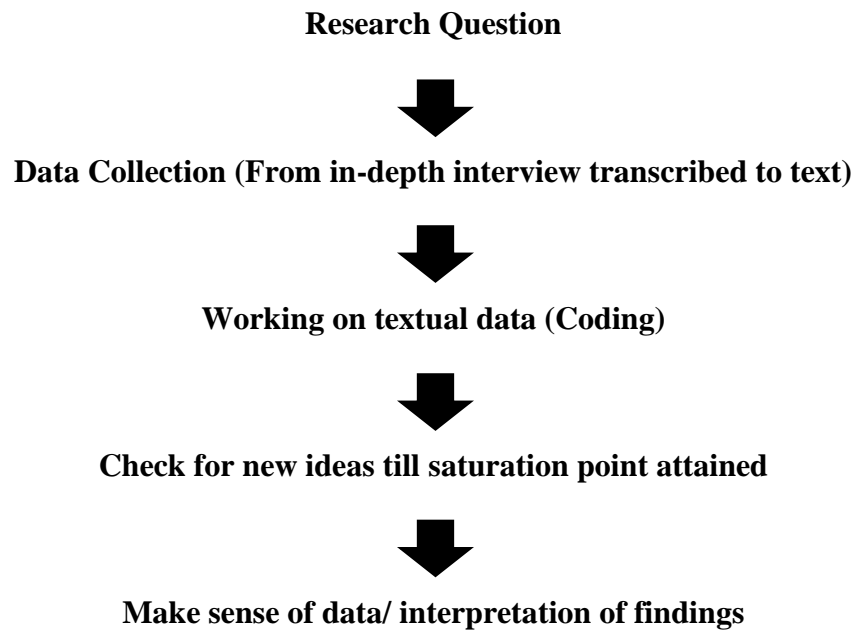
Overall, the experience gained from the pilot work not only enabled me to improve the clarity of my research questions on the overall outcome of the study, but it has also provided an opportunity for me to obtain insights by making necessary adjustments to the interview questions. From the answers and replies

given, a fuller understanding of working mothers' thoughts, opinions, and experiences on their challenges, coping strategies and the effect of the coping strategies employed on their PWB can be acquired. Hence, I could be more alert in interpreting the meaning and context of findings in my main study. So, after I was done with modification of the interview questions as shown in Table 3.4, likewise, I sent the questions for expert's review. Upon approval, similar to what have been done in my pilot study, I was ready to embark on my main study more confidently.

3.10 Data Analysis By Thematic Analysis Technique

For data analysis, my qualitative research included searching and arranging the interview transcripts, observation notes, and other non-textual materials that I accumulated in order to have a clear picture on the challenges faced by the participants, the coping strategies employed as well as their PWB status after the coping strategies are employed. My process of analyzing qualitative data also involved coding that ultimately subdivided the huge amount of raw data to subsequently assign them into categories in order to build evidence. Figure 3.1 below indicates presents the steps and flows that involved in my data analysis process:

Figure 3.1:



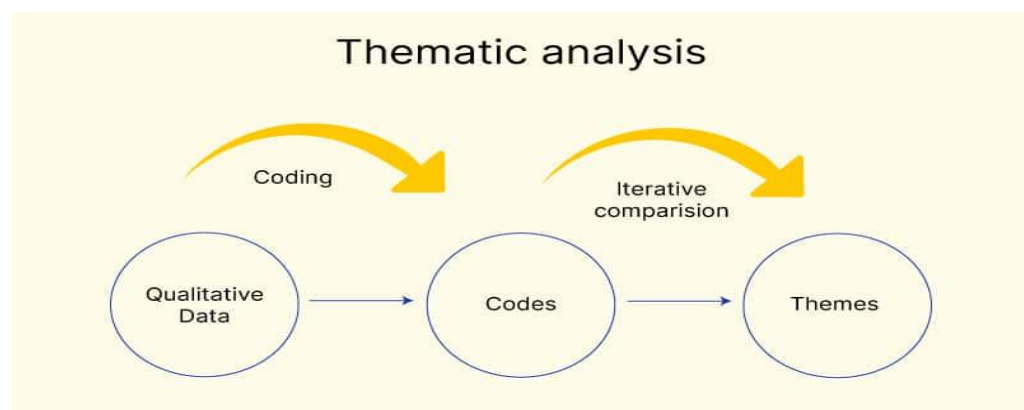
In short, upon answering all three research questions, I collected data through in-depth interview and transcribed it to text in order to work with textual data by way of coding. Along the way, I checked if there were any new ideas arose till saturation point attained. As mentioned in sampling size, I understand the importance of reaching saturation considering it has become a critical component of qualitative research that helps make data collection robust and valid (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013). Therefore, saturation was monitored continuously throughout the process of data collection.

Following analysis of three sets of data, as I began to come across with similar comments in regards of challenges faced, coping strategies employed and PWB related concerns, it hinged on the idea that data saturation has started to

establish. However, for completeness purposes, I still continued with my data collection for two more interviews to ensure no more additional themes are derived.

After the 5th interview, there were no new themes generated from the interviews. This literally means I have collected sufficient data to achieve the research purpose. Therefore, it was deemed that the data saturation was achieved and it is time to stop collecting information as ‘no new data,’ ‘no new themes,’ and ‘no new codes’ are generated and further data collection would have similar result. So, I decided that no additional participants would be invited to take part in my study. Understand that saturation aids decisions about the adequacy of the sample size, as I already have sufficient data to show evidence of saturation, I hence stopped collecting data and proceeded to data analysis. As explained, all the interviews were first recorded and then transcribed. The transcription has been analysed using thematic analysis technique.

Figure 3.2:



Speaking of thematic analysis, Braun, and Clarke (2006) were of the view that such technique provides flexibility to analyze the data and allows the meaning and experiences to be captured collectively for richer explanation. While in my study, by going through the entire interview transcript, I strived to look for meaningful patterns in themes across the data. I made sense of data and interpreted my findings by way of data coding and theme creation.

3.11 Reliability and Credibility of the Study

Qualitative methods are inherently different from quantitative methods in terms of philosophical positions and purpose (Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative studies, the researcher is often the primary instrument of data collections. Thus, it is frequently criticised for lacking transparency and appropriate justification in the analytical procedures. The findings could be a collection of personal opinions subject to researcher's bias and consequently affecting data quality (Rolfe, 2006). With that in mind, demonstrating scientific rigour when undertaking qualitative research becomes even more challenging.

Sandelowski (1986) emphasized that the goal of qualitative research is the truth of the experience. Rigor can be achieved through thoughtful and deliberate planning, diligent application of reflexivity, and honest communication between me and the participants regarding the study and its results. Therefore, to minimize the inaccuracy and increase the reliability and credibility of the research, the following guidelines will be observed. For

instance, when accounting for personal biases which may have influenced the findings (Morse et al., 2002), this can be addressed through my self-reflexivity. More has been discussed under reflexivity.

Having this in mind, interview questions will usually be designed in an open-ended way and reviewed by professional academicians. Open-ended questions can prevent the participants from just simply agreeing or disagreeing to statement posed. I also need to guide the participants in providing truthful and honest answer. If the participants do not understand the questions, it can be asked again in a different way or use questions that allow them to select from a range of potential choices rather than a simple 'Yes' or 'No.' Moreover, the pilot study can also serve as an 'invigilation' for questions to be validated and evaluated, trusting in the participants' understanding of the questions.

Speaking of acknowledging biases and avoiding it during sampling, an ongoing critical reflection of methods is required to ensure sufficient depth and relevance of data collection and analysis (Sandelowski, 1993). Therefore, it is imperative to have meticulous record keeping, demonstrating a clear decision trail, and ensuring interpretations of data are consistent and transparent (Long & Johnson, 2000). Besides, it is essential for the researcher to demonstrate clarity in terms of thought processes during data analysis and subsequent interpretations (Kuper et al., 2008).

As an example, I was required to be constantly reminded to consider all the data obtained and analyse it with a clear and unbiased mind. Continually re-evaluating the responses can keep pre-existing assumptions at bay. Besides, I will need to consider potential bias while constructing the interview by arranging the questions in good order. Keeping the questions simple, asking general questions and gradually delving into deeper questions can be very good options too.

Most biases can be avoided by framing the questions and structuring the interview skilfully, such as removing leading questions that prompt participants to respond in favour of a particular assumption. Research that is completely unbiased can be ideal, yet it may not always be possible. Hence, it is vitally important for me to address every detail at the study design stage from the beginning to avoid any possible bias. To minimize bias throughout the entire research process, the goal for me is to stay objective. For transparency purposes, participants will be required to review the content of the transcript by me, and I will expect the participants to revert with comments (if any) More has been elaborated under data triangulation.

Thus, establishing a comparison case/seeking out similarities and differences across accounts can ensure different perspectives are represented (Slevin & Sines, 2000) For instance, I might plan to interview the participant's

husband and colleagues to gain multiple perspectives. Likewise, more has been discussed under data triangulation.

3.12 Data Triangulation

Sandelowski (1993) is of the view that different methods and perspectives help produce a more comprehensive set of findings. The practice of data triangulation is essential. It is to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Correspondingly, data triangulation using multiple methods and source of information in qualitative research can help me to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. It is also perceived as a research strategy to evaluate the validity through the convergence of information from different sources.

In light of this, I need to ensure whether the transcript truthfully reflects the meaning and the intent of what the participant meant. With regards to this, Birt et al (2016) proposed ‘member checking’ as a technique to enhance the credibility of results. It is also known as participant validation. To facilitate this, data or results will be returned to participants to check for accuracy, to ensure it resonates with their experiences.

Long and Johnson (2000) states to ensure the final themes and concepts created adequately reflect the phenomena being investigated, member checking

somehow provides participants with the opportunity to engage with the interpreted data as they are invited to comment on the verbatim transcript. Thus, rich verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts are important to support the findings of the study (Slevin & Sines, 2000).

To reduce the risk of biased results in order to enhance the validity of the study, participants will be required to review the content of the transcript by the researcher (Birt et al., 2016). In this regard, I have sent the transcript (via email) for the participants to review, and I expected them to revert with comment (if any), within 24 to 48 hours after the interview. For accuracy purposes, such practice is important to ensure all 3 RQs are answered. Whereas, to check the data's trustworthiness, the four criteria stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) will be referred. They are truth value, consistency and neutrality and applicability.

Thus, by varying data sources, I managed to gain a more complete picture of my research problem as well as valuable insights from multiple perspectives and levels. The data collected was used to confirm and support the findings and consequently the conclusion of my study (more has been discussed in Chapter 4). As the data from more than one sources were obtained, I become more certain of the trustworthiness and was more confident that my findings reflect reality. To summarize, the findings from the data collected from the relevant parties have drawn the similar conclusions. In other words, congruent with what Guion (1969) has posited, the validity in the finding has been established.

3.13 Reflexivity

Within the context of the current study, I was aware that I needed to consider the ways in which my presence or interactions with participants might be influenced by my own background, experiences, and prior assumptions, judgments, and beliefs. For instance, I felt empathy for the participants in view of the challenges faced. I was prone to focus on their emotional and social response. This may likely to shape the way my research is conceived, carried out, interpreted; and produced. So, I knew that I have to be attentive to the cultural, social, and ideological origins of my own perspective and voices; the perspectives and voices of those I interviewed as well as the perspectives of those to whom I report my research.

Therefore, when interviewing my participants, I understand that I needed to acknowledge my role in the research by remaining neutral so as to maintaining the objective position as a researcher. I tried to ensure analytical distance by avoiding over familiarity and maintaining sufficient detachment. On the ground of this, I made conscious effort to set aside my own views and reactions; and listen from the perspective of a researcher. It was however difficult for me to be entirely objective as well as to set aside my personal experience, and thus taking an insider position.

Considering it is an important way to establish rigor in such qualitative research, tantamount to the processes of defining measurement tools for validity

in quantitative research, thus, reflexivity has been included within the methods section of the research to eradicate possible biasness in research design and analysis due to my assumptions and perspectives, being a working mother who had incorporated work and family roles for 11 years.

That being the case, I kept reminding myself to critically reflect about the position I am taking as a researcher, how my thinking came to be, how I have taken this stance into account in my research, how the pre-existing understanding is constantly revised in the light of new understandings, and ultimately how all these in turn affects my research. So, the research design could explicitly incorporate a wider range of different perspectives. Here's how I enacted reflexivity in practice.

Within the context of reflexivity, the interpretive element recognises that interpretation is not just based on a simple analysis of facts or data, which reflects some kind of 'reality'; instead, it is aware that interpretation is influenced by the assumptions of me doing the research, the values and use of language (Renz, 2002). Hence, the role of language comes into play where after developing the interview questions, I obtained approval from both supervisors before sending the same for expert's review.

Then, I kept the participants engaged in the research process by setting my pace by deliberately adopting a ‘back seat’ approach in setting the scene for the interview to take place, so the participants would feel they were exercising a measure of control over the interview process. At the end of each interview, I took time to ensure that participants were not feeling distressed by their participation, in these interviews. None of them expressed such concerns or appeared to be distressed or uneasy.

Along the way, I kept reflecting on the research topic, research questions, approaches, methodologies, focus and outcomes. Noting how they may have shifted at times, I revisited these throughout the research process. Given that reflexivity means interpreting one’s own interpretations, the field notes, observations, and subsequent listening to the video recording and reviewing transcription all facilitated the research process. With these in mind, I evaluated responses to the research subject, participants, and process by keeping notes of observations, interactions, incidents, conversations, and emotions.

Besides, I also reminded myself of the motivation for undertaking this research, what underlying assumptions I might be bringing to it and how am I connected to the research, both experientially and emotionally? For instance, despite my academic aims, I had some personal aims too. The academic and the personal aims could have been very much inter-twined. So, I wanted to understand in-depth, as part of a personal process of self-discovery, how I came

to be myself, as a woman, working mother, and academic, with the myriad sensibilities that all these beings entail.

I set my goal of data analysis by identifying common themes that emerged from comparison across cases via individual interviews. I reflected on her data collection by exploring and revisiting interview transcripts numerous times to gain a sense of the data that were emerging. After all, my aim is to come to a deeper understanding of myself through the understandings I gained of others from their oral histories, and my greater understanding of myself informed those understandings of others. The endeavour involved in my analysis work was used to draw up the coding framework to underpin the analysis (and interpretation) of all the interview data.

As such, by merging multiple perspectives in the construction of knowledge, a more complete and less biased understanding of the data could be gained. The above reflexive actions went beyond simple reflection on the research process and outcomes. It increased the accountability for the knowledge that is produced and helped the researcher to view the situation of the participants from a wider and deeper angle. When multiple layers and levels of reflection were incorporated within the research, it enables my research process and outcomes to be more open and adaptive.

Eventually, my interpretation and representation of reality therefore actively creates reality. Considering the positions from which I spoke and asked questions, as well as the social context in which the conversations took place, I came to know myself and others better by observing and reflecting on the experiences presented by the participants, and by reflexively reviewing my own experiences in the light of their narratives.

All these come to be embedded in the way I produced knowledge, from defining research, data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and through to writing up. Essentially, the engagement with perspectives on motherhood and the sociology gave me some new insights into my own identity and that of the research participants, which in turn informed new knowledge and insights.

3.14 Conclusion

To recap, this Chapter has explained how a qualitative in-depth interview has been used to gather data, with both oral and written informed consent collected before each interview. Basically, the data was collected from full time working mothers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for almost two months. Due to the required specificity of the participants as mentioned earlier, a purposive sampling method was adopted in order to have some common ground of analysis. Next, Chapter 4 shall proceed to provide the results and findings to show whether the methodology described in this Chapter was observed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS/ FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the results from the transcribed and coded data derived from the in-depth interview with five participants in my study. It addresses the three research questions which have been mentioned earlier. As explained, qualitative case study has been adopted to allow various aspects of the working mother's challenges, coping strategies and PWB to be explored and examined in depth (Rashid et al., 2019). Direct quotes from participants are used to shed light on themes as well as to lend support and elaborate points in which participants sought to make clear.

4.2 Data Collection

That being the case, five working mothers were recruited to participate in the study. They are all Chinese, married, and full-time mothers working in private sectors in Kuala Lumpur whose ages range from 40 to 44. All of them have children between the age of 4 to 13 years old. All 5 participants have contributed to my study by sharing their real-life experiences being a working mother, that includes the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed as well as their perspectives on their coping outcomes on their PWB

after the coping strategies were employed.

Basically, all participants have been incorporating work and family roles for between 8 to 21 years. They spend on average 40-50 hours at work per week. Table 4.1 below summarized the demographic background information of the participants in my study. All participants ($N = 5$) consented to recording of their interview and they managed to complete the entire interview session. Following the interview, I transcribed the recordings and allowed them to view the transcript via email. Necessary amendments have been made upon their confirmation of the same. More has been described under 4.2 Data Triangulation.

Table 4.1:

Demographic Background of the Participants in Kuala Lumpur

Participant	Age	No of Child/Children (Age)	Job Title	Weekly Work Hours	Years of incorporating work & family roles
P1	41	2 (Age 9 & 13)	Media Strategy Specialist	40	21
P2	41	2 (Age 4 & 10)	Business Desk Editor	50	11
P3	40	1 (Age 9)	Lecturer	50	11
P4	44	2 (Age 9 & 11)	Lecturer	40	11
P5	41	2 (Age 6 & 8)	Manager	45	8

4.3 Data Analysis

To deal with the rich voluminous data in practice, I first immersed myself with all the raw data collected by watching back the interview recording, reading transcripts, and studying reflective notes for numerous times. I further labelled the data into manageable sections to enable comparisons and drawing connections. To aid the process of interpretation of data collected, all the key issues and concepts were made clear. The emerging main themes, subthemes and sub-subthemes from the data were also identified amongst the details. In the process of data analysis, data triangulation appeared to be an important research strategy to help enhance the validity and credibility of my research findings. To a great extent, it facilitates validation of data through cross verification, and reduces research bias that comes from using a single method, theory, or myself as a researcher. As such, the consistency of findings can be ensured.

4.4 Data Triangulation

In the case of my study, to cross-check evidence as well as to reconcile contradictions in data (if any), I have been using transcript confirmation as one of the triangulation methods for P1 and P5. While for P2, P3 and P4, I have proceeded to interview the participants' close friends and their colleagues upon obtaining their consent to the request. The 7 interview questions below have been asked during my interview with the participants' friend and colleagues for data triangulation purposes.

1. In regards of the difficulties that Px was facing being a working mother, could you please elaborate a little on that?
2. Have you ever come across with any kind of situation whereby she will have some urgent matters like kids falling sick or any other urgent matters that required her to excuse from her work?
3. What will she do when she is too overwhelmed by her multiple roles?
4. So as far as you are aware, what is her greatest concern in view of her role being a working mother?
5. In terms of the work-life balance, do you think she managed well?
6. Could you please give some examples?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

4.5 Presentation of Findings

Upon completion of the process of data triangulation, I have more complete understanding of my research problem as what I have done has provided me with a more holistic perspective on my research questions. So, I am more certain and confident that my findings reflect reality. The findings below hence represent the result that is compelling in response to the research questions that I aim to answer. To recap, my three RQs are as follow: -

1. What are the **challenges** working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family life?
2. What are the **coping strategies** adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges in both work and family domains?
3. How is working mothers' PWB after the coping strategies are employed?

4.6 Research Question 1: Challenges

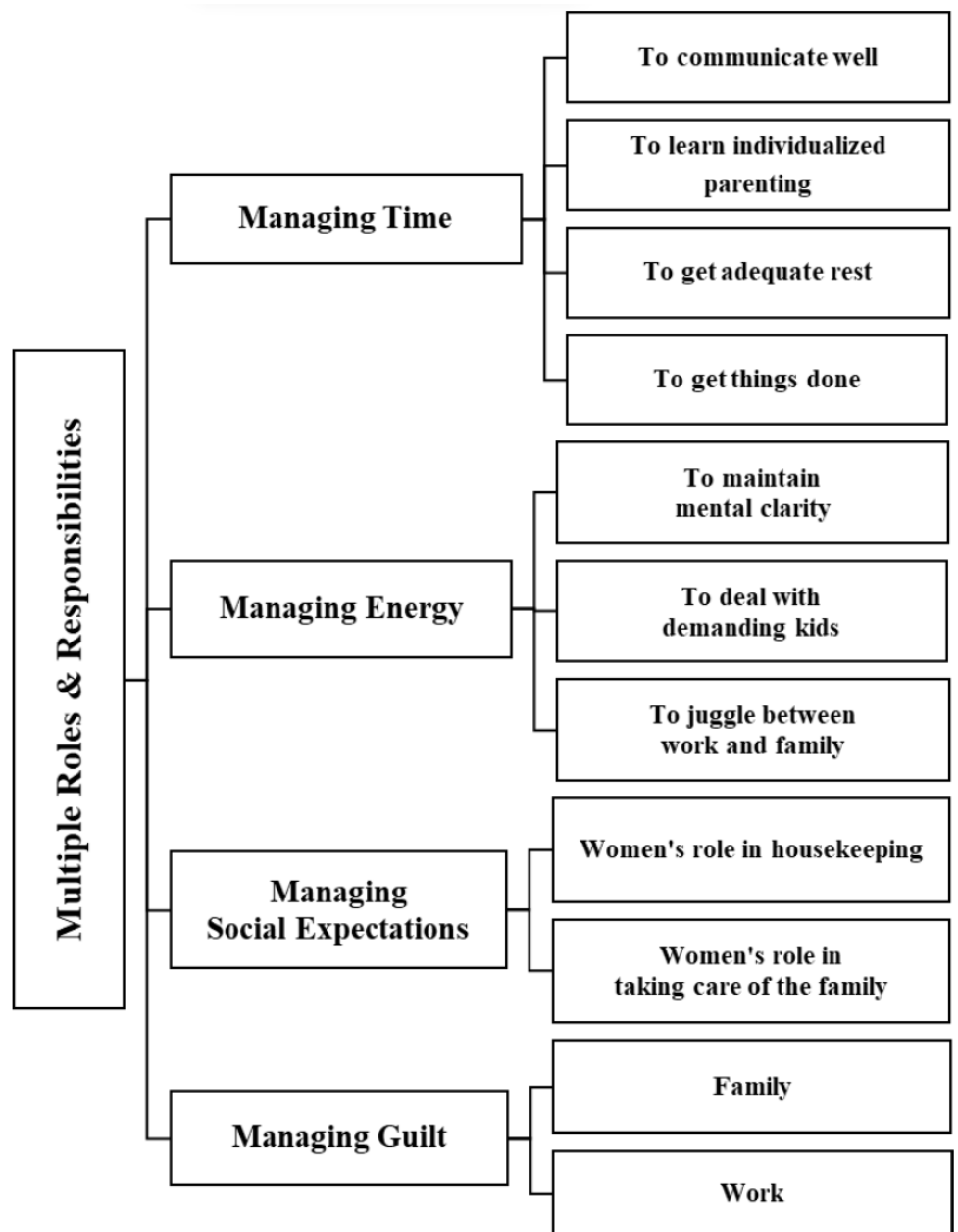
Based on the thematic analysis, there are one overarching theme emerged from the data – multiple roles and responsibilities. There are four subthemes that emerged from the main theme. They are managing time, managing energy, managing social expectation, and managing guilt.

4.6.1. Overarching Theme: Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

From what was shared by the participants during the interview, they were of the view that multiple roles and responsibilities they shoulder appeared to be the most critical challenge they encountered. In this context, multiple roles and responsibilities refer to the various roles and commitments the participants have being a working mother. Being a mother, a wife, a daughter, an employee, along with some other positions require them to manage their household, children, elderly care, self-care, and many other responsibilities deemed necessary. When they have to endure both work and family domains that are mutually irreconcilable at times, these led to occurrence of strain in their everyday life.

Figure 4.1:

Overarching Theme of Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

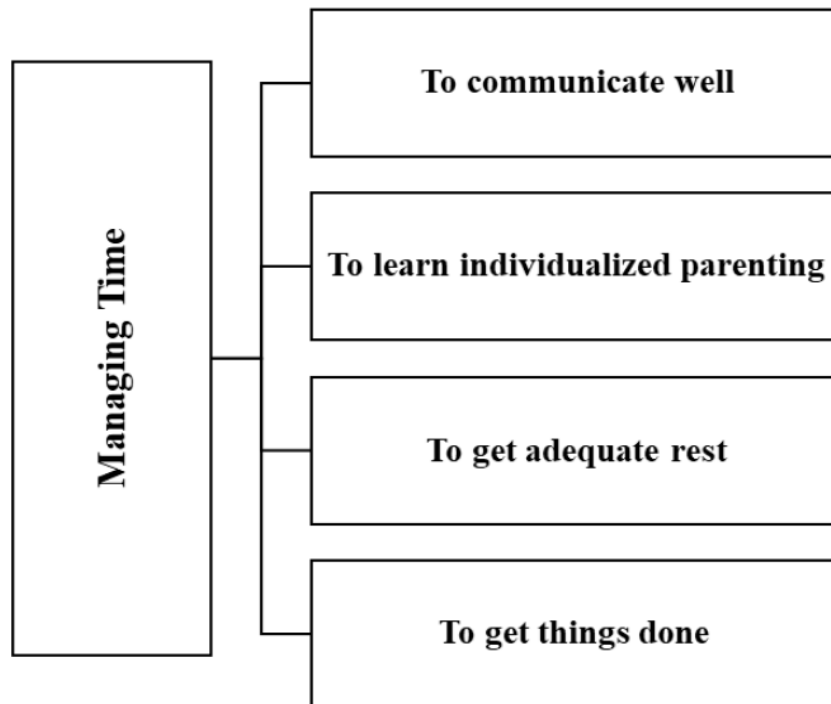


4.6.1.1 Theme 1: Managing Time. All participants highlighted that their domestic and family duties actually compelled them to work harder for longer hours. For instance, being a full-time working mother, they have to get up earlier than everyone else in the family so that they are done with the necessary chores including ensuring both themselves/children are ready to go to work/school. In view of this, all of them described that ‘not having enough time’ as their major concern.

Considering their hectic schedule, time is always a luxury and their top concern. From dawn to dusk, non-stop working has been part of their pace of life. There are extremely limited opportunities for self-comfort and rest, let alone pleasure. Especially when they have too much to handle with too limited time in a day, it becomes extremely challenging for working mothers. The time pressures associated with either role made it physically unfeasible to fulfil all the duties required from the other role. This is apparently the dilemma of the participants.

Figure 4.2:

Theme 1 of Managing Time



4.6.1.1.1 Subtheme 1(I): Managing Time to Communicate Well.

With regards to this, P2 kept complaining about having no time to educate her kids and communicate with her husband as she always gets home late. P2's remark below clearly explained her frustration of not having sufficient time to educate her kids. As for her elder kid, she is concerned about his attitude and the mindset. For the younger one, she needs more time to teach him writing and read him story books. Yet her weekday schedule is too packed and does not allow her to do what she intended.

By the time I reached home is very late already. I have not enough time to educate or to teach my kids. Even sometimes I have limited time to communicate with my husband. Due to limited time, I also can't get to communicate properly with my kids every day. I will need more time to teach him to writing, to read the story books, all that. So, what I do is drying my hair while reading book or listening to podcast while driving to work. I just want to fully utilize my time. (P2)

P2's statement above indicated that she tied her challenge to 'manage time'. This challenge appeared to be a burning issue for her. Actually, she hopes to have more time so she can communicate with her family members, so they know what she is currently doing and with what she is busy. However, due to her having extremely limited time, she can't get to communicate properly with my kids and husband every day. One of her close friends also said P2 always complaint about having no time for her kids like supervising their homework or educating them to have good attitude. This is the challenge P2 had in face of her roles and responsibilities. Her statement above indicated that she has somehow figured out how to better manage her time by 'multitasking' so she could save some precious time and use it to communicate with her loved ones.

4.6.1.1.2 Subtheme 1(II): Managing Time for Individualized Parenting. P4 on the other hand, hopes to have more time for individualized parenting. So, her remark below that said, 'you just do not have enough time', has clearly suggested that she needs to manage time for individualized parenting dealing with her children. That prompted her to spend more time to probably read up or watch videos on parenting style.

You have no skills. You need to spend time to learn. But you just do not have enough time. You know every child have their own characteristics and you have to learn skill to suit them. Maybe some children are introvert, some are extrovert. (P4)

Each child is born unique, with strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies that make him or her an individual. Because of such uniqueness, different children, even within the same family, respond to the same or similar parenting styles in different ways depending on their personalities and perceptions. So, being the primary nurturer, a working mother's responsibility is not only to care and look after the child's physical well-being, but their PWB too.

Some children you can straight away tell them not to do that, they will listen to you, but some may not accept. They think that you are criticizing them, they think that you do not love them. (P4)

P4's statement here showed that children nowadays are not easy to handle. They can be sensitive to even mild comments that seem harsh to them. Often, it is the interaction between a child's nature and his or her parents' child-rearing style that make things work. In other words, it is nature and nurture, the way they knit together that creates the best environment for their children's optimal growth and development. To fit between a child's personality and a parent's child-rearing style can be very challenging. It takes time, patience, and effort.

Therefore, P4 seriously needs more time to figure out what is best to deal with her children with different personalities, study their individual temperament which stem from their genetic and spiritual nature, so they can be guided in a balanced style of connection, regulation, and autonomy that best matches their unique set of strengths and weaknesses. Yet, her multiple roles and responsibilities may not allow her the time she needed to tackle this.

4.6.1.1.3 Subtheme 1(III): Managing Time to Get Adequate Rest.

On the other hand, P5 described her workload being a working mother as incredibly challenging when it comes to managing time. She explained that being a working mother, disruptions and sudden schedule changes are likely to happen. The time caught in traffic jam could be longer than one thought.

Every day you got to be stuck in the jam. Whenever you stuck that you got to know another unintended cross of time. Once you reach home you really wish that you could complete all the tasks and you can let your kids to have rest as early as 8.30pm. In fact, I wanted to do that every day but everyday also cannot. (P5)

P5 gave an example when she planned to let her kids go to bed by 8.30pm but traffic jams would routinely spoil her plan. Her statement here demonstrates that managing time is her major concern. When she is trapped in the traffic and reaches home late, her children couldn't get to rest as early as planned. So, when she said she cannot reach that task, it means she struggles to fulfil the mothering tasks she sets out to accomplish. With the heavy work and parenting demands

placed on P5, she has very little time for herself. She wishes she could have 36 hours or even 48 hours.

Very lack of time. Can I have 36 hours or 48 hours per day? Because it is like never enough. So, you have to deal with them. Even rest also affected a lot because you spend so much time on them. (P5)

This clearly suggested that P5 really wished to manage her time well so she can get adequate rest. In view of the limited time, she has in a day, juggling demands in both domains feels incredibly hard for her. The time poverty she was experiencing made her feel so bad that she would need an entire 12 or 24 hours more to accomplish the tasks required. Also because of the limited time she has, she is running each day on insufficient rest.

4.6.1.1.4 Subtheme 1(IV): Managing Time to Get Things Done.

P1 is another quintessential example of having multiple roles and responsibilities. She is an advertiser and a Media Strategy Specialist in China Press. During office hours, she will be collaborating and meeting clients from various places to discuss some advertising projects, strategize marketing plans. Whereas for weekends, she will have to run certain marketing campaign and activities to introduce prospective clients to new product release. Some brainstorming sessions will have to be held after office hour where she has to attend certain events or dinners at night. However, despite such hectic full-time job, she also holds quite a number of important positions like ‘secretary’ in some associations.

My roles as a mother, as a wife, as a daughter, as a staff in the company, and then some more I have joined many associations, and I am the secretary and many other positions. I need to wake up early in the morning around 7 o'clock and start my busy day. (P1)

Having to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities on daily basis is indeed challenging. Besides sending her children to school and addressing work demands, P1 also needs to fetch them back, prepare for dinner and attend some events at night if necessary. Hence, managing time is also critical for her. Otherwise, she will be running late for the tasks that she has planned for the day.

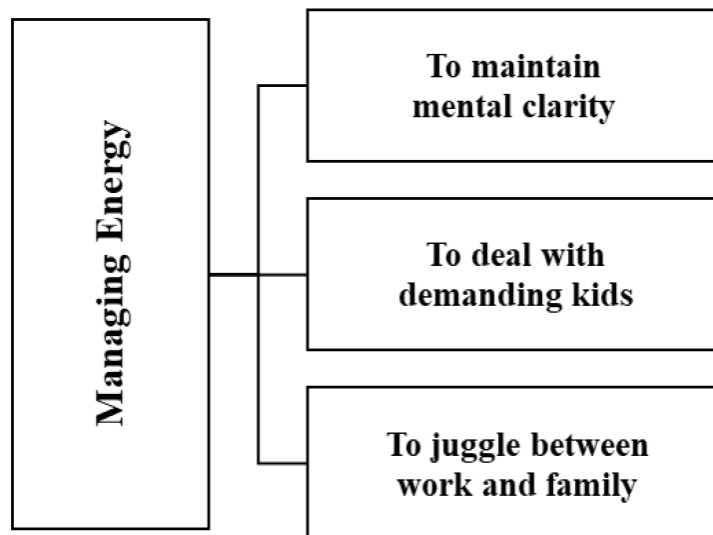
4.6.1.1.5 Summary. It is obvious that working mothers are constantly busy tackling the demands of their professional, parenting, and personal life, wrestling with their daily multiple roles. The never-ending duties in which they have to catch up on parental duties or other domestic chores often leave many mothers frustrated and exhausted, suggesting that most of them have low PWB. Hence, they deemed 'managing time' their challenge in view of their multiple roles and responsibilities.

4.6.1.2 Theme 2: Managing Energy. More often than not, the stress from either home or work may spill over from one domain to the other, affecting a working mother's energy as well as their abilities to perform effectively. In this context, participants need to allocate and conserve their energy to maintain mental clarity, hence juggle well between work commitments and family

demands (e.g., deal with demanding children).

Figure 4.3:

Theme 2 of Managing Energy



4.6.1.2.1 Subtheme 2(I): Managing Energy to Maintain Mental

Clarity. As mentioned, when participants have too much to do with too little time in a day, it certainly leads to energy depletion. P1's statement below clearly showed that managing energy is a core issue that needed to be addressed by her. Because of being too exhausted, she just couldn't focus on the issues she faced. As a result, P1 is of the view that such energy drains had negatively affected her mental clarity. In face of problems or challenges, she could not really think of a solution simply because she is too tired.

For me, it is incredibly challenging because I cannot enjoy all the activities because I'm too exhausted to handle all these. I was so busy until I cannot think in-depth when I face problems, or challenges. (P1)

4.6.1.2.2 Subtheme 2(II): Managing Energy to Deal with Demanding Children. Pertaining to this, P5 also shared her concern which indicated how restless she was having to entertain her kids in view of their endless requests and questions. Since they are only 7 years old and 9 years old, such attention-seeking behaviour is completely understandable and P5 seem to recognize that too. Actually, she also wanted to spend some quality time with her children, but this can be incredibly hard for her as she usually feels worn out after a hard day's work. When she finally got home, she just wanted to have peace of mind.

Not only clean them and play with them, but I also need to check their homework and attending to their endless questions. After you finally call it a day or whenever you having an incredibly challenging day, you reached home, and you got to face your kids 'mummy mummy mummy mummy' it's like mummy never ends. (P5)

Besides looking after the daily needs of the children and ensure that they are properly being taken care of, a working mother also needs to equip themselves with proficient parenting skills such as listen to her children sharing about the day's happenings, answering their doubts, or helping them to deal with certain issues.

If I can't answer their questions, once I ignore them, they won't come to me anymore. To play with them also you have to adapt their culture, what is happening around them. Sometimes, in order to engage them, I have to keep myself 'updated' like what they like or what is the current trend. Somehow those things you don't like but you have to learn. (P5)

It is clear that P5 wants to be a modern ideal mum who is in tune with her children. She seemed to place more demands on her time and higher expectations on herself. P5 sighs and feels incompetent if she is unable to answer their questions. Here markedly demonstrates that working mothers, despite their busy schedule due to roles and responsibilities, they still need to face the pressure of needing to keep up with their children's interests. It is definitely not easy. Thus, P5 wishes to have enough energy after work to still be an attentive mother, dealing with her demanding children. In fact, being a working mother can be strenuously tiring, especially when there are difficult days when the stress is too much, or things just go wrong. This sounds true and resonates well with P5's statement below.

When the kids are playing around, you have to spend a lot of time cleaning all the mess, answer their question...omg. When you try to be nice to them, but they really mess you up or like the whole house they mess up like nobody else's business, what do you think? Your anger will be coming out. Whenever you reach home then they ask you questions that you may not be able to answer, you will lose your patience. They really trigger you out. So much stressful. (P5)

Not only feeling incompetent, but P5's statement here showed her tension and anger arose when she got to struggle to comply with numerous demands of

her children. Despite her desire to attend to her children, she may not have enough energy after returning from work, especially when thinking of answers to their queries, resulting in her becoming angry at her children and also herself for struggling to keep up. Such energy drain not only takes a toll on her mental health, but also her physical health. That's the reason why she needed to manage her energy.

It is especially exhausting for the mother whose tasks and responsibilities does not end after coming home from work, but continues in the parental role, which not only including bath them, guide their homework, play with them, clean their mess but also attend to their endless questions. All these seriously in need of high energy level. In fact, P5 does not want to de-prioritize herself by placing her daughters' need above hers. She wants to balance both. But she is caught between her need for sufficient rest after returning home from work and her duties as a mother. This underlying conflict becomes a mental tug war inside her, even as she seeks to have peace of mind. Being over-stretched has indeed depleted her energy and challenged her patience.

4.6.1.2.3 Subtheme 2(III): Managing Energy to Juggle Between Work and Family. With regards of managing energy due to their multiple roles and responsibilities, P2 commented that the demanding nature of her job as a Deputy Editor in Business Desk demanded her to work for long hours. She is in charged with the task of overseeing the reporting process of the newspaper's

business section, and its online publications. Not only does she cover corporate events and functions in the local business community, but she also watches international, regional, and national economic reports and trends that impact the Malaysian economy. It is even more challenging nowadays with the digital transformation of the media, as her workload becomes excessive.

Since I am with media house so that's why the timing wise, the working hours wise will be a bit longer or I need to on call even by the time I get home is about 9.30pm. (P2)

The quote above shows that P2 arrives home late and exhausted each day. However, she still has to be on 'stand by' for work, particularly when there is major news break like stock market crashes or budget announcements, even though it is past working hours. So, she needs to manage her energy for those additional work commitments.

Despite P2's hectic work schedule, she is active in her role as a mother, connecting with the children, as well as educating and disciplining them. She checks and guides her elder son's homework; reads story for her younger son and put both of them to bed. As such, managing her energy is a core issue, considering her multiple roles and responsibilities. As for P3, she assumed the role of being a working mother with complete dedication, taking care of her children and simultaneously making extra effort in her career as a university lecturer. Here is how she described her daily routine.

I used to wake up early in the morning to make sure everybody in the house is taken good care of. After I finish working, I will need to rush back to pick up my son. (P3)

Furthermore, P3's quote has clearly supported the fact having to take on the heavy lifting of both childcare and homemaking, 'managing energy' is undoubtedly her primary concern. Due to her multiple roles and responsibilities, sleeping late at around 3am or 4am and getting up early before 6 am became a norm for her, especially when she has to fulfil her work deadlines.

When we reach home then I need to prepare the dinner, do all the cleaning chores, and prepare things for tomorrow's perusal, and spend sometimes to interact with the kid. I only sleep 2 to 3 hours when I have a lot of administrative work. If that happened, then I have to burn midnight oil. That's why lack of energy makes me very tired. Can you imagine from early morning we start working it is considered like non-stop you know until the night time, or even mid night, so exhausted already. (P3)

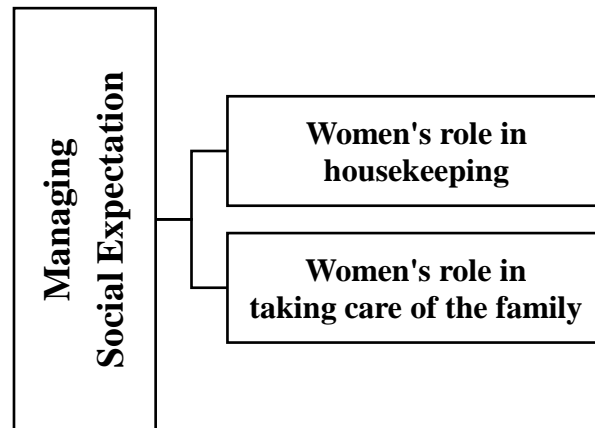
P3's quote above clearly shows she is drained out of energy from trying to equally fulfil both work and mothering roles. She further elaborated that she did not want to sacrifice her limited bonding time spent with her kid. So, after she puts her kid to bed and is done with all the family-related chores, she will continue with her work, even though she is already so exhausted, and it is already late at night.

4.6.1.2.4 Summary. For working mothers to juggle between both work and family domains, they often have to fulfil their professional obligations alongside various family duties such as fetching the children back from school, doing household chores, preparing for dinner and other necessary tasks as a homemaker on a daily basis. These have yet to include the additional work assignments that are brought home when necessary. Considering all these, participants have deemed ‘managing their energy level’ as their challenge in view of their multiple roles and responsibilities.

4.6.1.3 Theme 3: Managing Social Expectation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Malaysia is a collectivistic society where family is a core element of the social structure. With that in mind, it comes with social expectations that certain roles and responsibilities are supposed to be shouldered by women instead of men. That extensively includes working mothers placing the needs of their children and their family above their own, adjusting their life pace to be the primary caregiver, investing their time, energy and emotional reserves into their role and be solely responsible for their children’s growth.

Figure 4.4:

Theme 3 of Managing Social Expectation



4.6.1.3.1 Subtheme 3(I): Managing Social Expectation on

Women's Role in Housekeeping. Essentially, gender remains a key predictor of housework even in today's modern society. This is ostensive when P3 commented: "No, all by me. He did not even wash his cup." What she means here is that she is solely be responsible for all the house chores despite being a full-time working mother. It clearly explains why ideas around who does the housework is so ingrained, and starkly suggests how such issue affects the concept of household chores distribution.

Somehow, women tend to be judged more negatively compared to man, for having a messy house and undone housework. P3 has to confess that even though her husband is willing to give her emotional support whenever she needs it, but when comes to household chores, there is obviously an unequal distribution. In other words, managing social expectation on women's role in housekeeping, has become something challenging for P3.

4.6.1.3.2 Subtheme 3(II): Managing Social Expectation on Women's Role in Taking Care of the Family. With regards of managing social expectation, P1 also has something to say. As spoken earlier, P1 holds a number of positions in some associations besides her full-time job. She stays together with her mother-in-law who holds to strong traditional cultural values, always hoping that P1 leaves her job and remains at home as a full-time housewife and sole caregiver to manage the household roles well. However, P1 chooses to continue working. Her mother-in-law is very unhappy and tends to speak harshly to her sometimes. She states, "She doesn't like me to work. She wants me to be a housewife so I can take care of my children and my husband."

P1's quote here reveals how she suffers from the heavy burden of traditional gender and social norms that her mother-in-law expects from her, making her life stressful and difficult. The social expectation that the main caregiving role and domestic tasks are solely for women has inevitably imposed additional pressure on P4.

To take care of the family, the burden will always fall on women. Not only for children, even elderly, the whole world will expect you to take care of them. No matter how hard you work they also think that is what you supposed to do. Coz the whole world expect that you do all these jobs. While husband has very solid good excuses to escape from all these domestic works. And my mum said to me, 'you don't blame. I am your mother. I also did that last time. Why can't you?' This is a family of both of you. Why mother has to take care of most of the family tasks? (P4)

P4's statement here shows how unfair she feels having to juggle both work and family demands. To her, it is like burning the candle on both sides. It seems that working mothers are severely disadvantaged by caretaking responsibilities that are often disproportionate to their spouse.

While society places an unreasonably high standard on working mothers, having to lean in at work and give their all to nurturing their children concomitantly, they hope that their views and struggles can be heard. P4 sometimes wonders why women have to devote significantly more time to the family compared to men? While men can have their personal time after they return from work, women simply can't. P4 feels even more frustrated when her own mother also cannot understand her. When she quoted what her mother said: "You don't blame. I am your mother. I also did that last time. Why can't you?" This is obviously another statement that contained social element.

This actually means, P4's mother literally expects her (P4) to follow in her footsteps and quietly accept her domestic responsibilities and role as primary caregiver of the children. Many Malaysian women from the older generation hold to the traditional gender role for women. As such, not only is there limited understanding and sympathy for working mothers in the struggles they face, but they are also questioned by fellow women of the earlier generation including from their own mothers.

For mother, it is very stressful and tiring. Also, maybe the father, the kid's father, or the husband even female themselves like your mother or your mother-in-law also think that this is a women's job. You like it or not, you can cope it or not, you have to cope with it. (P4)

This clearly reflects P4's dismay when comes to managing social expectation on women's role in childcaring particularly. When she said her husband, her mother or mother-in-law think that is just women's job, again, this indicated such bias is obviously resulted from social expectations. P4 continued expressing her dissatisfaction.

Sometimes it is because our environment, our society doesn't give working mother a very sufficient support. the burden always down to mother. When your kids are naughty in the school, do not do their homework, they will always call mother. (P4)

P4's statement here indicates that working mothers not only bear the burden of childcare, but for the discipline and behaviour of the children as well. When dealing with any issues related to the children at schools, mothers will be called and held answerable, but not the fathers. In other words, working mothers' career aspirations are often viewed as ancillary to family responsibilities. Even if they pursue a career, they should simultaneously fulfil all family demands. As such, many working mothers lament the struggles of balancing roles between work and home, even as societal expectation amplifies their stress.

When societal norms assign mothers to be the sole nurturers in the family, working mothers come under intense pressure, as they are questioned and sometimes accused of neglecting their children for the sake of pursuing their careers. This is why many working mothers constantly feel inadequate and are made to feel guilty for failing in their duties. Speaking of this, P4 sighed again.

Even though you work, you also have critics from the family members. Actually, we already do our best. The thing is we do not have enough resources and support, and they do not treat us fairly. This is the point. (P4)

P4 stressed again her experience of unfairness from the deeply rooted social expectation. To manage such social expectation, she urged for more resources and supports to be provided for working mothers, to be treated more fairly. P4 further added the sentence below, which sounds to be clearly supported the idea of social expectations too.

It's all your job. Even if raining in the morning and you want to sleep a little longer, but you just can't. The whole world will expect you to send the children to school. (P4)

It could be obvious that P4 would have experienced such sense of being judged by others. In this case, she will be labelled as 'lazy' or 'deficient' if she did not manage to send her children to school on time. This is because, 'Family' and 'Children' are perpetually seen as a woman's domain. They will certainly be

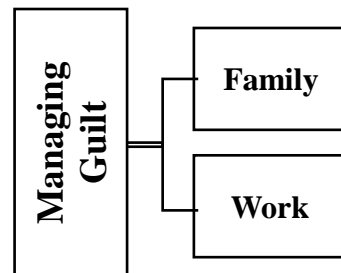
judged more harshly than men despite being part of the workforce. Thus, managing social expectation in taking care of the family, is a goal P4 is constantly endeavoring from time to time.

4.6.1.3.3 Summary. Despite being part of the workforce, participants are struggling with the social and cultural expectations that a woman's greatest priority should be caring of her family rather than her personal wants and career ambitions. Managing social and cultural expectations have therefore become an invisible hurdle for them to work through.

4.6.1.4 Theme 4: Managing Guilt. In this context, guilt here refers to the sense of distress about their potential responsibility that participants experienced as they think they are not performing well enough being a mother in family domain, or as an employee at work. So, they feel down about themselves, thinking that they are likely to mess up at some point even though they may not have done anything wrong. This sense of guilt or self-blame often come from working mothers who have an ideal of what a perfect mother or perfect employee should be.

Figure 4.5:

Theme 4 of Managing Guilt



4.6.1.4.1 Subtheme 4(I): Family. As the participants would probably have experienced, there are some strong emotions tied up with motherhood. In this context, working mothers' guilt in the family domain refer to feeling bad for their children, especially for being unable to do enough. As many mothers love their children and are invested in making sure their children are healthy and happy, they may blame themselves when they slip up. Such sense of guilt can be acute especially when working mothers equate the amount of time spent with their children to the amount of love given. These feelings can be challenging for them considering that each working day reminds them that they are spending time away from their children.

To a certain extent, it is a mental perception that any time spent away from their children means they are not providing enough motherly attention. Moreover, this guilt is compounded when work time spill into family time, thus making them feel that they are less of a mother. For instance, they may feel guilty when they leave their little one crying at nursery or they may pick them up late

because they are too busy with their work.

Taking P3 for example, having to shoulder multiple roles and responsibilities, she somehow feels that she needs to be 'perfect' all the time. She admitted that she always strives for perfection. Hence, she often has the constant nagging feeling of being 'not enough'. She wishes to have more hours in a day, so she gets to accomplish more tasks with more satisfactory results. But because of how busy she is with work and chores; she feels really bad for not spending enough time with her child. She is just human after all, having only limited time and energy each day.

Because of the insufficient time, most of the time I feel bad I just feel like I could do better due to my perfectionist thinking. Especially in accompanying my son. He definitely needs my companionship. But because I am too tired, I will choose very simple game or sometimes when I am really really tired, I just pretending playing with him. This makes me very guilty. (P3)

This demonstrates how guilty P3 feels for not spending quality time for her son. The fact that she said, 'I feel bad' and 'this makes me very guilty', literally means she was grappled by sense of guilt for not having enough time for her son. Consistent with what illustrated by her colleague, she thinks this is quite common among all working mothers. They always wanted to spend more time with family. But full-time working hours severely limits that.

Motherhood isn't a 'profession' but forms a big part of the mother's identity. Many connect their success as a mother with their own personal worth and sense of value. As a result, working mothers face the dilemma of allocating too little time for their children. For P3, sometimes the pressure and expectations of being a good mother can become really intense. Bearing in mind that raising a child is a huge responsibility. With such high stakes, working mothers are prone to 'beat themselves up' when things do not go the way they want.

While meeting the deadlines of certain work assignment, taking care of the child may be put aside in terms of priority. To prevent this, P3 rather chose to sacrifice her sleep in order to finish her task after she puts her son to bed and completed all family-related obligations. Otherwise, she would feel even more guilty for not spending enough time for her son. Apparently, 'managing guilt' is a goal that she is constantly working on. Similarly, P4 also presumed that all working mothers tend to have such sense of guilt, especially when the boundaries of work and family time are blurred.

I supposed this is a very common symptom to all the working mothers. You feel guilty to your children. You don't have enough time for them because you need to spend sometimes on your work also. So, you feel that 24 hours is always not enough. (P4)

Working mothers love their children and set some form of standard for themselves. When they do not live up to those standards, they feel like a failure

and inferior as a result. This further fuels feelings of being overwhelmed, exhausted, and defeated. In fact, being burdened by guilt is a common theme expressed by the participants, because with work hours and responsibilities, there is never going to be enough time to fulfil all they hope to achieve as mothers, hence understanding and learning to manage those negative feelings become important.

4.6.1.4.2 Subtheme 4(II): Work. In this context, guilt in the work domain refers particularly to feeling guilty for not being able to meet all of their work demands and targets. Such sense of guilt may originate from a process of self-evaluation and introspection or involve their perception of how others at work value them such as their bosses or colleagues.

Since they feel obliged to their work as full-time employees, when family responsibilities take up time from completing work tasks or deadlines, they felt bad that they are not doing enough in their jobs. However, time spent with family members at home does not mean that they are not devoting sufficient commitment and attention to their work, because that is outside work hours. For instance, working mothers may feel guilty having to apply for leave when their children are sick and need to be taken care at home. But when employee performance is being evaluated, working mothers may be marked down in terms of productivity, because the time they spent on leave could detract from their overall work time and make them appear less effective for not achieving higher

targets.

Taking P4 for example, she felt upset that she does not have the luxury of having more time to be equally and actively involved with her work roles due to family commitments. Conspicuously, such issue is prevalent among participants. It occurs especially when they have to miss work in order to take sick child to the doctor. P4's colleague also revealed that when either one of her kids is unwell, P4 will need to stay at home to take care of the child.

Sometimes, if that is really urgent and taking up plenty of working hours, P4 will take emergency leave. If the situation allows, she may work from home while taking care of the sick child. This happens quite often especially because P4's kids are still really young. Whenever she receives a call from the nursery school, she will need to rush back. Sometimes she even has to take one or two days leave to take care of the sick child.

I feel very guilty to my working place that I really do not spend exactly 8 hours a day to work. I did complete all the task. For extraordinary work sometimes I choose not to participate. (P4)

Here, P4 mentioned she felt very guilty for not doing enough as an employee. She felt rather incompetent at work due to her family commitments. Actually, she wanted to do more but due to limited time and energy, she just couldn't perform as well as she wishes. Hence, managing guilt has been a goal

she is striving for.

In fact, it is not a matter of being less competent or less committed. For P4, lacking adequate time to engage in additional work assignment to remain competitive within her fields has somehow impeded her career development. That comes with the sense of guilt and the feeling of not being good enough. Being a lecturer at university, she wanted to pursue her PhD study since many years ago, but the plan has been delayed due to her family obligations. Some may hold the view that working mothers are less serious about their career, but is that really the case?

4.6.1.4.3 *Summary.* The sense of guilt that participants experience, whether it's in the family domain or work, invariably hampered them from achieving more for themselves. Actually, they deserve applause for being courageous women, having to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities as working mothers. It would be good for working mothers to become aware and manage those feelings of guilt, because they must remember that they are already trying their best, hence becoming less burdened by that emotional baggage would allow them to simply continue performing both roles daily without unnecessary negativity towards themselves.

4.7 Research Question 2: Coping Strategies

Based on the thematic analysis, the overarching theme that emerged from the data is self-management. There is one theme that emerged from self-management. It is making choices.

4.7.1 Overarching Theme: Self-management

Reflecting back on the challenges mentioned in RQ1, the participants all have pressures of time poverty and work demands, social and gender expectations, along with personal guilt. Such mental load literally hides in the minutiae of daily life and exists most starkly at the intersection of various demands. Hence, it is essential to understand working mothers' coping strategies to broaden their ability to manage and work effectively with the challenges they face. When asked about their ways of overcoming obstacles, all 5 participants deemed that despite the fact they have endless challenges ahead, with good self-management, they will have a clear purpose in life as they take the lead and manage themselves well.

Thus, in this context, self-management reflects an individual's ability to direct their behaviours and work towards their life goals, though great effort is required. Considering how the multiple roles of being a working mother are draining, working mothers need self-management in order to balance their roles and responsibilities at both work and the family domains. In this manner, these mothers would have better control of their lives by making choices in allocating

'me-time' for themselves, setting boundaries, prioritizing, and seeking support, so that they can lead more fulfilling and happier lives.

Figure 4.6:

Overarching Theme of Self-Management

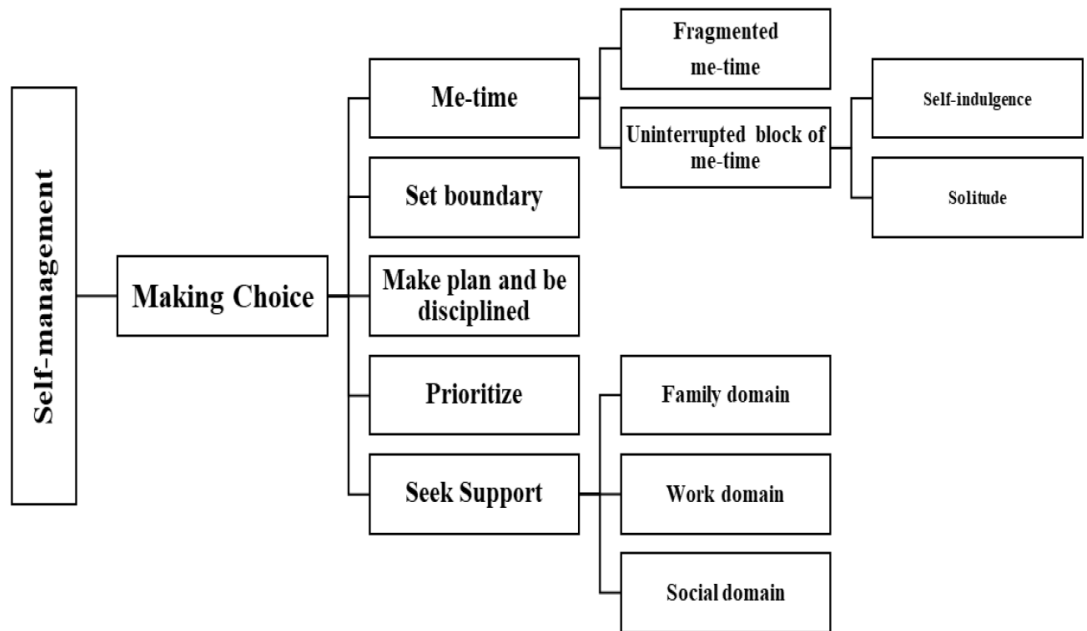
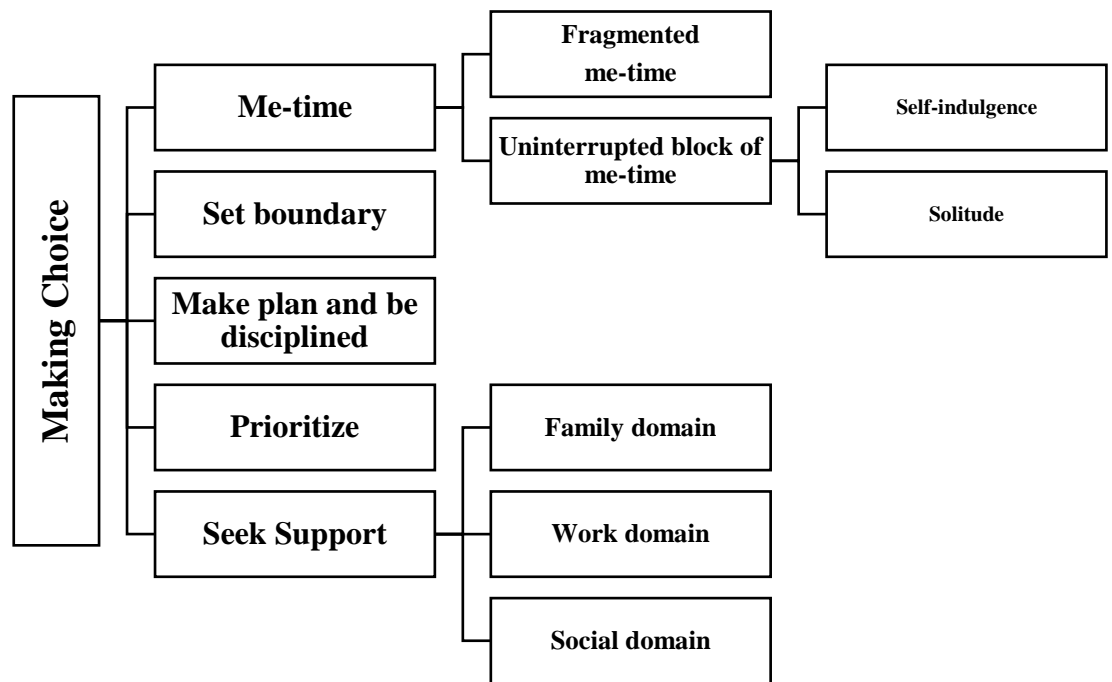


Figure 4.7:

Theme of Making Choice



When asked how to better manage themselves, participants were of the view that their morale and their emotional health are key pillar to the child's strength. By better managing their emotions, they can have better PWB. Working mothers who can control their behaviour and emotions tend to be calmer and have clearer thinking even when undergoing stress. If they feel overwhelmed, how can they co-regulate their children's emotions? In other words, working mothers' PWB is of great importance, not simply for them as individuals but more importantly because of the related well-being of their children, thereby resulting in the general and collective well-being of the family as a whole.

However, PWB is an individual pursuit that is self-supporting. That literally means, working mothers have self-responsibility for their own choices, behaviours, and lifestyles. With regards to this, they have to put themselves in their own shoes first, that is to listen to themselves identify and take a step closer to their underlying needs and think about how they can be met. Working mothers therefore need to consistently self-evaluate for their own self-care, so that they can draw on coping strategies and work towards a sustained well-being. Since it is an individual pursuit that is self-supporting, so it marks a constant pursuit that is resolute in mind and purpose, that takes place on a regular basis, so participants are incessantly working on. That's the reason why the theme- 'making choice' is here to indicate the effort that they consistently exert working towards a sustained PWB.

4.7.1.1 Theme of Making Choices. This theme consists of five subthemes – making choice to allocate 'me-time' for themselves, making choice to set boundary, making choice to plan, and be disciplined, making choice to prioritize, and making choice to seek support. It is interesting to note that even though working mothers may work the same hours as their husbands, they still choose to take on most of the childcare responsibilities.

Inevitably, stress can be a big drain on one's physical and emotional resources. While all participants indicated their exhaustion and struggle in managing multiple roles, they agreed that to better manage themselves, making

choice can be a powerful antidote to stress. In the face of the challenges that participants mentioned in RQ1, by redefining their roles and responsibilities, a shift in perspective from one of self-blame to allowing room for a realistic balance of work and family roles, they could make wiser choice to better support the achievement of both their physical and mental health. These will inevitably increase their confidence in their mothering ability as well as the ability to manage roles and responsibilities by letting go of unrealistic expectations that otherwise result in excessive and unnecessary burdens.

4.7.1.1.1 ***Subtheme 1: Making Choice to Have ‘Me-time’.*** One of the most important ways for working mothers to cope and manage their personal and emotional well-being is by finding personal time for themselves amid the demands and challenges of work and home life. Such private time for these mothers to do what they like and enjoy can be described as ‘me-time’ when they are not attending to the responsibilities and duties expected of them. All five participants deemed having silent moments like ‘me-time’ to be an essential component of stress relief and ultimately their overall wellness. Basically, this theme consists of two sub-themes –fragmented ‘me-time’ and uninterrupted block of ‘me-time’.

4.7.1.1.2 ***Subtheme 1A: Fragmented ‘Me-time’.*** *Working mothers often feel they are being spread too thin between work and family demands, having to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities. As a result, they find*

themselves with only small pockets of free time in between different activities or chores rather than a long, interrupted block of time to do as they please. Fragmented 'me-time' describes how busy people like working mothers find short periods of time in which they are able to squeeze in personal time for themselves, which could be taking a brief rest, talking to a friend, listening to music, or watching a relaxing video. With regards to this, P4 admitted that she tends to have very fragmented 'me-time'.

Being a mother, you can't have a very complete full slot of 'me-time'. How to use up all your fragmented free time in between to wait for your children to get out from the school? Usually, it is not a bad idea to talk to other parents that you will share or also you will find out what your children doing. You yourself and other mothers also can become good friends. (P4)

P4 usually utilized her time by talking and getting to know other parents at her children's school, while waiting for them to be released. When P4 said she had to share what her children are doing and how other parents and her becoming good friends, it showed that she really enjoyed spending her fragmented time in this way. Such times indeed help her to manage her demands when she feels overwhelmed as it allows her to learn more about how other people's children do at the school, thus indirectly gaining insights into her own children's lives, especially if some happened to be their classmates or friends. She also gets to bond with other mothers, informally sharing about raising children and finding support on the issues they face; and even becoming friends. Such fragmented 'me-time' actually helps her to turn her stress into a positive experience.

Sometimes in between to wait the water to be boiled, you do what you want to do. After being a mother right, really... all your life really centres in children only. So, 'me-time' will allow you to search something that you are interested. Sometimes talk to my friends over the phone will help to release. It's good to have a few close friends that you can talk with.
(P4)

Even though it can be a short period of time (while boiling water), P4 can still enjoy doing what she wants. She confessed that after becoming a mother, her life is literally centred around her kids, 'me-time' however, enables her to have time for herself. For instance, she knows how to take time off to just enjoy and chat with her friends. That really makes her feel good and relaxed.

4.7.1.1.3 Subtheme 1B: Uninterrupted Block of 'Me-time'. Such 'me-time' is the conscious effort that working mothers take to recharge themselves. This is when participants spend focusing on themselves only, by doing things they want to do, without any disturbance and interruption. Such 'me-time' can be spent in a range of ways and can vary for person to person.

4.7.1.1.4 Subtheme 1B(I): Self-indulgence. Self-indulgence allows working mothers to do something that make them feel happy. So, they will usually reward themselves after completing what is needed to be done or some particularly difficult tasks. For instance, they will give themselves a good break, paying attention to what they want. When they self-indulge, they give in to their desires. Whether it's really good cheesecake or a reckless splurge at a

department store, self-indulgence enables them to experience a thrill. Speaking of this, P1 commented that her 'me-time' motivates and reduces her stress when she does something she loves. She states, "I go to hot spring, have coffee, go to yoga to reduce my stress, to motivate myself."

Here, P1 shares some activities which she indulged during her 'me-time'. Doing what she likes, she feels empowered, and regains her energy. She stressed that no matter how busy she is, she will make sure her 'me-time'. Time spent alone is indeed a great way for her to recharge and slow the pace. Since she had time to rest, she can be more relaxed. In contrast, P3 chooses a different manner which she finds relaxing and therapeutic, that indeed help her to release her tension and stress.

*I really find doing exercise a good way to distress. Initially I just took a brisk walk or a short run for about 15 minutes. So, when the sweat all came out, you really feel relieve. I also go to a coffee house, to just sit there doing nothing or watching some short clips or footage, from YouTube from my mobile phone, I daydream, or just go online to do some online shopping even window shopping. I feel that I get myself recharge.
(P3)*

P3's remark here clearly proved that she felt indulged and recharged after her 'me-time'. While she may appear to be doing nothing much, these seemingly frivolous activities are precisely enjoyable because they are unhurried and have no pressure attached to them, thus allowing her to forget about work and chores. That's why she feels recharged after all. To sum these up, P1 and P3's cases here

demonstrate that working mothers who are able to spend quality me-time for self-indulgence tend to feel happier.

4.7.1.1.5 Subtheme 1B(II): Solitude. Even though it is vitally important to ‘connect’ to people, but it’s also critical to balance such social time with time spent alone. Moments of solitude hence give a chance to working mothers to be physically by themselves and not virtually connected to anyone through social media, texting, or any other way they might communicate. In this regard, P2 stated that she practices meditation during her self-alone time to stay calm and relax. She states, “Even though it’s 10-15 minutes, self-alone time still very important for me to stay calm or to be more emotionally intelligent. I feel relaxed each time I practice it.”

P2’s statement here showed how relaxed she felt after spending her silent moment being alone. Besides meditation, Tabata is also one of P2’s options because it’s flexible and she can do it at home or anytime when she is free. Whenever she is caught with certain issues, her ‘me-time’ tends to give her inspiration and solution.

I will be more relaxed. Sometimes I might get caught with some issues or some challenges or some troubles, after my ‘me-time’ or meditation then I feel like some kinds of solutions like came out. (P2)

The fact that P2 mentioned ‘some kinds of solutions like came out’ evidently showed how important solitude was to her, helping her to solve her problems. Her close friend also said P2 followed a master and learned this meditation skill. She managed to achieve greater mental health after practicing this (meditation). On the other hand, P3 also builds ‘me time’ into her daily life despite having hectic schedule. It is something very precious to her as she could usually feel a sense of normalization and ultimately, empowerment to navigate her world differently. In striving her best effort to cope with a burdensome environment, ‘me-time’ gives her room for private sphere to subjugate her needs for others.

It is a space for only me and myself. Without any external disturbance. During that ‘me-time’, I am back to myself. Even though it’s just a short one but at least I feel that I get myself recharge. (P3)

This notably reflected P3’ intention to be alone where she provides herself a safe zone and a wonderful company. For her, solitude can also be a desirable state. Addressing P3’s sense of guilt that was discussed earlier, such ‘me-time’ is a great way that leaves her free of judgment, allowing her space to focus on herself only. So, similar like what was experienced by P2, P3’s comment here illustrates how important solitude was to her, where she can reflect and know herself better.

I learn from self-reflection, no matter is good experience or not so good experience. I may find out better solution in case in the future I have similar situation. So, this is good for my self-learning, self-improvement so that I can continue to move on. (P3)

P3 further described that during this ‘me-time’, she managed to do self-talk, self-learning, self-reflection and reviewed on the experience or lesson that she gained. If it is a good one, she will use it again in the future. If it is something bad, she will review why and try to think of another better way. Such practice allowed her to do self-learning, self-improvement so she could continue to move on more confidently. While in contrast to P4’s earlier remark that is child-centred, P5 holds the view that a mother’s life is not all about her children. P5 believes that she needs to pause and think about her purpose and life goal too.

Why do I need to spend so much time in terms of work or in terms of my kids like my whole day is like all of them. What is the advancement or what do I want? I need to take a break. I need to clear my mind before I can move forward. It’s like too much thing inside the head. You cannot move on. (P5)

The fact when P5 said ‘I need to take a break’ and ‘I need to clear my mind’, she literally seeks to have her uninterrupted ‘me-time’ to be alone, so she can think clearly for the future. Obviously, such ‘me-time’ could give her a break so she could find calm amidst the chaos and daily hustle-bustle of life.

4.7.1.1.6 Summary. To recap, such ‘me-time’ creates space for the participants to come up with their own perspectives, ideas, solutions; and how

they think and feel about the things that are happening in their life when they feel overwhelmed by their roles and responsibilities. When they reserve such time for themselves, they are able to use their imagination, creativity, learn about their feelings and thoughts, and ultimately develop a better understanding of who they are, and what they want, that eventually helps them to cope with their challenges more efficiently.

In reality, motherhood can be exhausting, burdensome and tough. Meanwhile, social expectations add to the idea that mothers should do more and that their life should be revolve around children only. Nonetheless, when we ponder and re-examine the “should” and how these expectations can adversely affect working mother’s psychological wellbeing, ‘me-time’, whether it’s fragmented or uninterrupted, allow them to let go of such expectations.

4.7.1.2.1 ***Subtheme 2A: Making Choice to Set Boundary.*** Setting boundary helps working mothers to define the parameters of what they can and what they need. As for P3, she manages her priorities by drawing a clear line between work and family. She tries not to bring back her work and tries to spend her time with her family members whenever she is off from work.

Normally during weekday night or even weekend, I try not to work. When the deadline is really very tight or when you know the task, itself is really very urgent then I have no choice but to work. (P3)

Here, it looks like P3 has made a choice to set the boundary on what is outside working hours, keeping the work out of her home life. However, there are also situations when the line gets blurred too. Apparently, P3 had to go beyond those boundaries due to some unforeseen circumstances.

So, I put the clear line between working and resting time. Whenever I feel very bad at work, so I will try to draw a clear line between office and home. So, when I reach home, I try not to bring back the emotion when I am home. I trained myself that, when I am at home, I am absolutely for the family.....so I don't bring my problem to home. (P3)

P3's statement here shows that she tries to pull herself back from letting work take over her family time again. Knowing that it is a constant pursuit, she understands how important it is for her to consciously put a clear line that could actually help her tremendously. From what she shared here, she is making effort of preventing the negative experience at work from affecting the emotional life of her family. Often, work and family life are contradictory and in direct conflict. This is particularly true when P3 has taken on an emotionally and time-demanding job where it is very easy to get overwhelmed. Without clearly defined boundaries, she is likely to lurch from one crisis to another, or even start to resent the demands in both domains of her life.

At the same time, reflecting to P5's case that mentioned the endless requests from her daughters that drives her crazy, she doesn't have to burden herself by providing constant stimulation for them all the time. Setting boundary

is a goal she is working towards. She hopes that she could choose to just answer one question at a time to secure a little more rest time for herself, so she will not feel too overwhelmed by questions asked by her daughters.

4.7.1.2.2 *Subtheme 2B: Made Choice to Plan and Be Disciplined.*

For working mothers, juggling multiple tasks adversely affects their PWB and diminishes quality time. Making plans and being disciplined however, help them to be able to cope with the various demands of life. These are intertwined elements. While self-discipline gets one nowhere without clearly defined goals, a person who plans with no discipline tends to procrastinate too. Only by combining both aspects together can the person go a long way in keeping with responsibilities, staying productive and making most of their day. Taking P1 as an example. She perceived that proper planning is very important to ensure things are done in a more systematic way. If she has a plan, she just has to repeat it and make it a daily routine.

When you repeat the cycle, you systematically arrange all these things, but you still face some ad-hoc jobs (unexpected), or whatever come to you unexpectedly. So, whether you want to accept this ad hoc job? Everything needs to be pre-planned. It's just like a daily routine then you just repeat. When you do it and repeat it systematically, then you will adapt to the activities. (P1)

Considering P1's multiple roles and responsibilities, self-management in making more informed choices helped her to better adapt to any new problems

that may arise. She chose to make a choice by pre-planning her schedule. By doing so, she trusts things will be more systematic and proceed more smoothly. Meanwhile, P1 also indicated that she doesn't like last-minute changes because it is stressful for her to handle, but life throws up surprises and disruptions. Getting down to the essence of making plans, there is the need to be flexible to manage the unexpected. Nonetheless, planning is still necessary, because without a plan, one could be rushing from one thing to another in a manner that is chaotic, possibly leading to more problems to address.

For me, pre-plan for the very busy women like me is very important. I cannot handle things that come to me accidentally, for me, it's a stress. So, I have my decision to reject or accept. (P1)

This indicated planning is very important for P1, especially in helping her to anticipate and circumvent potential stress. Whenever she has some unexpected issues, she can be calmer and consider whether she wants to proceed with that 'unexpected' task. When she mentioned that she reserved her decision whether to reject or accept, it means she would reject if she doesn't want her existing plan to be affected. On the contrary, she would accept only if her existing plan would not be affected.

Within the context of self-management, it is assumed that all individuals wish to be empowered to self-manage their life in a way that aids in decision making while being mindful both physical and mental wellbeing. Aligned with

this, P2 also perceived that planning and being disciplined are the key techniques she employs to juggle her work-family obligations. During her me-time, she started to read some stories books or novels to relax. Besides, she also reads while drying her hair to save some time.

I read book while I am drying my hair. I read books that related to emotional control, it can give me or provide me some insights on how to handle my emotions or how to handle my relationship with kids. And I also start listening to podcast during my driving time from my house to office. (P2)

P2's comment here reflects that being disciplined empowered her to handle her work-family obligations more efficiently. Here the example shows how some pragmatic changes like reading books while drying hair helps P2 to free up more time on things that add value to her life (have good relationship with her children is one of those). Besides, when she said she listens to podcasts while driving to work, this actually adds value to her life by gaining more knowledge and insights, fully utilizing her time by doing something meaningful.

Given all the roles that working mothers are juggling—the push and pull from so many areas of their life, it can definitely be way too overwhelming. Hence, making plans turns out to be one of the best ways of managing, especially when combining planning with being mindful. It's an attitude and a habit that will increase self-awareness of what they want and need to accomplish. Consistent with what is revealed by P3's colleague, P3 is a very disciplined

person. She wakes up early in the morning even though she is always sleeping late at night due to work commitments. Waking early gets her to be ahead, so she can do more before she ‘officially’ kick-starts her daily routine.

I will need to wake up early in the morning to do whatever I plan to do. So, most of the time I wake up before the rest when everybody is still in their sleeping mode, I can do most of the things I like to do. (P3)

This shows that P3 made her choice to be disciplined. In view of her roles and responsibilities, she needs to wake up earlier than the rest in the family. Speaking of this, daily routine streamlining has become part of many working mothers’ lives. Making a list of tasks and organizing work before-hand are essential to ease their daily hassles and allow rooms for contingency planning. P4 does the same too. When she has some urgent tasks to rush and is not able to fetch her children back from school, neighbors or friends will be those whom she can approach in this case.

If their children also go to the same school, then can ask their help. Even sometimes I really can’t rush home on time, then I can ask them to fetch my children to their house first. (P4)

P4’s comment here shows how she plans with other alternative arrangements whenever needed. P5, on the other hand, hopes that she can be more disciplined in order to manage her time and roles more efficiently.

I got to be disciplined. I have to tell myself, today I have to make it. I have to be very stringent, telling myself that today you have to do that. If I am disciplined, I can be more efficient. (P5)

P5's remarks reveal her commitment to follow what she plans. By doing so, she can complete the tasks within the stipulated time frame, Somehow, it gives an interesting insight into a misconception, debunking the idea that women aren't naturally better at planning and organizing.

4.7.1.2.3 ***Subtheme 2C: Make Choice to Prioritize.*** Essentially, for a better PWB, working mothers will have to let go the typical mothering expectations by re-identifying priorities and re-focusing on things that support the said priorities. For instance, we don't all have the same level of education or income, but what we do have is the same amount of time. So, to become really good at the things that matter every single day, prioritizing becomes the key to obtain the maximum reward from one's daily endeavors, especially for working mothers who are burdened with multiple responsibilities from their roles.

If we make everything important, nothing becomes important. However, by way of prioritizing, working mothers learn to pause and ponder what actually demands their attention? What is the best use of time to give to obtain the most return on effort? What are the things that are non-negotiables? Considering these, they would only work on things that really matter. Hence, such prioritizing basically encompasses the elements of doing, deleting, deferring, and delegating.

Speaking of this, P1 said changes and disruptions will still occur despite how well she plans. So, what will she do to filter the unnecessary?

Every day even though you have already fixed all the activities, still will have changes. Whether you need it or you don't want it, or you accept it. Many people mostly women they cannot control their emotion. You need to build up the healthy emotion. Everyone's need is different. You got to know what you need. So, every day I will review my schedule, what I need to do and what I don't. I will try to reduce it. I will not make my schedule too tight every day. Last time maybe I will put 1 or 2 appointments every day, or 3 appointments. (P1)

P1's remark here demonstrates that emotional health is her priority, so she will manage her emotions in the tasks she undertakes. For instance, as she knows how much she can handle without being overwhelmed and sacrificing her emotional well-being; therefore, she will prioritize how many appointments, and which are important and necessary each day. Over years, she thinks she has improved. Her statement above also evidenced she has cut down her daily appointment over the years.

In view of the limited hours, one has in a day, P4 is learning to set more reasonable and attainable goals instead of striving for perfection. For instance, having the best-kept home adds undue pressure, so P4 modifies that expectation and does what is necessary for the home without going beyond what she can do.

I cannot ask for more hours in a day. So, I set my standard lower. You do not do until you got the 100 marks. Do not ask for the very perfect one. I also learn how to prioritize things. Which one and which task you think you need to prioritize, do that one first. (P4)

Here shows P4 accepting her limitations, especially with regards to the time she has, so chooses and adjusts the tasks accordingly. Besides, she also learns to prioritize. Since she prioritized 'time' so she would set her standard lower. However, she still feels really guilty for not achieving the result she wants at times. She blames herself and inadvertently reinforces the belief that she is inadequate. She is also flustered about why others manage more easily while she herself struggles.

At the beginning you really feel very bad, you feel yourself very useless. Why other people can do that, and you always cannot do and can't achieve the result you want. Along the time you will know la you have already tried your best, and this is the only thing you can deliver so then you just have to accept that. (P4)

Obviously, P4 learned as she trudged through. When she has made a choice to prioritize her PWB (self-worth) over result, she chose to accept that she has done already her best. For instance, she puts purpose (wellbeing) before goals (result), she managed to reframe her thoughts, she started to cultivate positive emotions like joy and gratitude by making the choice to focus on the good, savour moments in the present and be confident.

When my children growing up, along the way you find you have more free time because they know how to take care of themselves already. (P4)

Here showed another example of P4 by making choice to prioritize her PWB and reframing thoughts, such reflections of her experience through an empathic understanding helped her validating the underlying feeling of inadequacy resulting from managing multiple roles and responsibilities.

Undoubtedly, every human soul has some shortcoming and some limits. Only when we learn to accept our weaknesses, we go beyond. So, for P4's case, as her children grow and her career develops (she is currently pursuing her PhD), the needs of her children and herself, being a working mother will change too. Eventually, parties got to work on relevant changes that need to be renegotiated. Reflecting back to the challenges that P4 shared in earlier discussion in managing social expectation, when she is getting more used to making choice to prioritize, she can be happier, when she could finally let go of those unnecessary expectations her mother (and whoever she deemed) placed on her.

4.7.1.2.4 Sub-subtheme 2D: Made Choice to Seek Support. In essence, self-management empowers working mothers and by way of delegating, it enables them to explore their level of control within both family and work domains. As such, they will be able to determine areas where they can potentially relinquish control to allow others to help with the burden from being fully on

them. Finally, they will be able to take back some control for their own PWB.

As working mothers explore how much they can do and control within both family and work domains, they will be able to determine areas where they can potentially relinquish control to allow others to share and help with the burden. Instead of bearing and enduring all the stress from their responsibilities alone, working mothers can delegate some of the tasks for their own psychological wellbeing. To avoid burnout and being unproductive, seeking support is important for working mothers. More often than not, burnout is a result of saying yes to way too many things. It's like opening many browsers on computer. Even if we minimize them, it is still taking up memory, energy, unconscious focus, and all participants wonder why they are tired all the time. As they tend to put everything on their shoulder.

Considering the challenging life being a working mother, it is also tremendously rewarding when they feel supported and empowered. It makes all the difference. When they feel they are heard, seen, and understood, the affection and attention they get are able to motivate them to continue with their multiple roles. Therefore, when working mothers explore and evaluate their level of support both at work and at home, familial support, organizational support, and other friends who act as support system are not to be missed in creating a more supportive environment for them. In this context, they seek support from various sources that largely comes from their family domain, work domain and social

domain.

In view of the challenging life being a working mother, it is vital for these mothers to feel supported. When they feel they are heard, seen, and understood, the affection and attention they receive motivates them to continue with their multiple roles. Therefore, working mothers should explore and look out for support both at work and at home, whether it is familial, organizational or from friends. Having a support system makes all the difference.

4.7.1.2.5 Subtheme 2D(I): Seek Support from Family Domain. In this context, family domain consists of husband, mother-in-law, children, domestic assistant, and transporter. Cooperative and supportive husbands are crucial for overall quality of life. Indeed, the presence of spousal cooperation will definitely help working mothers in dealing with excessive work demands. It can be reasonably assumed that in the cases where the husband is being supportive in sharing the wife's work burden, it acts as a buffer to protect her from suffering high stress levels. Speaking of this, P4 recognize the significance of spousal support as key aspects of her role balance.

You have to know how to look for help. When we really cannot cope with it, we have to seek for help. Most of the time, husband is the first person I will ask help from him. As for house chore, mainly I do it. But my husband did share with me the housework. At the same time, we did hire a part time maid so she will come in to clean the house, doing most of the cleaning work for us. And now my children also growing up, they also

have to share part of it.” (P4)

P4’s remark here indicated she makes the choice to seek support from her husband. Indeed, she thinks she is lucky to have a husband who is willing to share some of the house chores. Besides, a domestic assistant and her children also contributed to house chores distribution. Hence, by delegating the cleaning to the maid and some to her children, the home is maintained well without her being overwhelmed. To integrate work and family life more effectively, P4’s statement indicated that making a choice to seek spousal support, hire domestic assistants to tackle harder tasks and engage family members in household chores are means of attaining a better PWB. Speaking of this, P1 also shared about their respective role in the family.

In family, I am responsible to wash the shirts (laundry), my mother-in-law cleans the kitchen, and my husband cleans the toilet. For me...I am actually the one who prepare for the dinner. If I cannot do it (perform her role), I need my husband’s help. We help each other. If I have meeting, I cannot go home early to prepare for the dinner, then I will arrange my mother-in-law or my husband to prepare instead. Actually, we cannot handle so many things so we must seek help.” (P1)

In this regard, P1 made the choice to seek support from her husband and her mother-in-law when comes to house chores distribution or other related family demands. Besides seeking support from her husband and mother-in-law, P1 also got help from transporter in sending and fetching her children to and from school so she does not have to rush whenever she has appointment. Such

approach helps her to be happier, more productive, and more efficient.

You need to make all these things 'autorun' then things turn out to be very good and very smooth. For example, I arrange for transporter fetch my son my daughter go to school and after school. (P1)

Whereas for P2, she confessed that it is quite tough for her to handle two kids without any maid or parents/ parents-in-law's help. Similar to P4 and P1, P2 sought support from her husband in handling her roles and responsibilities. However, despite receiving some from her husband, it is still insufficient. Her statement below shows her commitment to seek more support from her husband in sharing housework and educating the children.

I think it is not so easy for me. Especially when I have two kids now. To take care of them by myself, without any kakak or maid, or my mother-in-law, parents-in-law. Anyway, I got some helps from my husband. But I think I still need to communicate more with my husband so we can share the housework or to share some work to educate my kids. (P2)

As for P3's case, in view of the struggle to fulfil the numerous expectations, she often feels guilty and inadequate. To extricate herself from being overly stressed, she is committed to spelling out the chores her husband can help out with, so they could both share housework equitably. Bearing in mind, the earlier example where she indicated that her husband didn't even wash her cup, if P3 involved him in household chore, she could communicate her needs

to her husband in sharing some of the child-rearing responsibilities.

More importantly, if a husband is supportive and willing to lighten the social expectations on his wife, it could contribute to a closer relationship between husband and wife, hence a happier marriage and home for the children a well. If a husband remains supportive, willing to understand how social expectation influences their spouses' career and family life; and willing to share the mental burden equally, that will do wonders. When gendered expectations can be transforming into more cooperative and favorable attitudes towards working mothers. In any case, when working mothers who started to understand the essence of 'making choice', they would be able to cope better.

4.7.1.2.6 Subtheme 2D(II): Work Domain. In this context, work domain refers to colleagues, superiors, and women-friendly work culture the participants experienced from which they can seek support. As mentioned earlier, P1 stressed the importance of team spirit. She gave another example in the work context where her manager couldn't make it for a company dinner and asked her to represent her instead.

It's like working in a team. We need to help each other. In workplace also like that. If my manager cannot make it for dinner, I will represent my company to attend. (P1)

P1's shares how she and her manager they seek help from each other to accomplish tasks. Likewise, when P1 has some urgent familial affairs to run, her manager will give her the flexibility she needs. Indeed, flexibility is acknowledged as an essential aspect in participants' work-family experience.

It can be very common that when someone has to excuse from work early, she might be receiving taunting comments from workplace. On the contrary, if the organizations attempt to support flexible work hours or offer remote work, such support actually enable employees especially those who are working parents to perform better. Speaking of this, P4 felt grateful for having a very understanding boss. Indeed, a supportive working environment is very important to all the working mothers.

When I need to apply leave to take care of my sick children, even though last minute my boss will just 'okay la, I will approve.' I do understand for some companies they do not allow those last-minute application. So, this... the working environment itself, or the system is... how flexible is your working environment and working system itself actually helps mother a lot. (P4)

Apparently, the great flexibility P4 experienced in her workplace has made it easier for P4 to integrate work and family roles. Such women-friendly work culture has helped her tremendously especially when she needs to be excused to take care of her sick children. P4, being a lecturer in one of the universities in Kuala Lumpur, has not only a good boss, but good relationships

with her colleagues too.

You know mother always apply for emergency leave because of children. So actually, I am also quite lucky that I have a group of very understanding and helpful colleague who work closely together, and they are willing to help. In case of emergency, I still can talk to my students said that I really can't come so we have to cancel the class and replace next time. At least something that we have the flexibility to rearrange or reschedule. (P4)

P4 is also grateful to have very understanding colleagues and students. Her remark here clearly described how her work culture, helpful colleagues and understanding students helped her in lightening her burden as a working mother. There are many other organizations that would require their employees to apply for leave at least a week earlier. She is grateful that her workplace has offered her such flexibility.

According to P4's colleague, she used to take leave quite often, as her children tend to fall sick frequently. P4 would stay home and take care of them. Thanks to the supportive workplace culture and women-friendly work policies, P4 managed to accomplish all her work as required. She is also given flexibility to leave the office earlier, as she needs to fetch her children from school and prepare for dinner. She states, "I usually leave by 3pm, but I will continue to work at night if needed."

In fact, P4's case shows that when the employers and managers are willing to shape conducive office policy and work culture, working mothers are able to perform the assigned roles effectively. Though P4 described herself as a mediocre employee, but her colleague was impressed that she managed to accomplish all the necessary tasks despite the fact that she is working from home or leaving early.

4.7.1.2.7 Subtheme 2D(III): Social Domain. Besides familial support and organizational support that participants received from both domains, significant sources of *support* they received from their friends in their social domain also play a vitally important role in helping them manage their multiple roles and responsibilities. Pertaining to this, P5 has something to share.

It's the time you can talk, release your whatever in your mind. When I go out with my friends right, if I really enjoy that catching up, I really talk a lot of things in my mind. If I have good session of course I will feel released and I feel good. It's like you already come out and talk all the bad things out. (P5)

From here, it shows that P5 seeks support from her friends in her social domain. This is important for her to release her pent-up feelings and at the same time, find solutions to the problems she faced. Through this, she felt heard and knows she is not alone. Such support not only bolsters her resilience in stressful situations, but also recharge and energizes her in her work or other challenges.

For instance, when P5 viewed her daughters' endless requests of 'mummy this mummy that' as undue pressure, it can be deemed irrelevant for other participants. The level of emotional stress they are experiencing is different. Thus, what P5 did to reduce her emotional upsets by managing the demands, is through talking with friends about the challenges that she has faced. This is how her stress is dealt in an action-oriented way. By her attempts to improve her psychological wellbeing, such emotional support is an important protective factor for her in dealing with stress.

4.7.1.2.8 Summary. To reiterate, working mothers who have better self-management and constantly 'making choices' for themselves, have better self-control managing between family and work. They do not waver despite dealing with situations that challenge their endurance. Instead, they are able to solve difficulties more steadily.

4.8 Research Question 3: Psychological Wellbeing (PWB)

Based on the thematic analysis, the overarching theme that emerged is goal commitment. There are two themes that emerged from this overarching theme of goal commitment. They are positive relationship and life purpose.

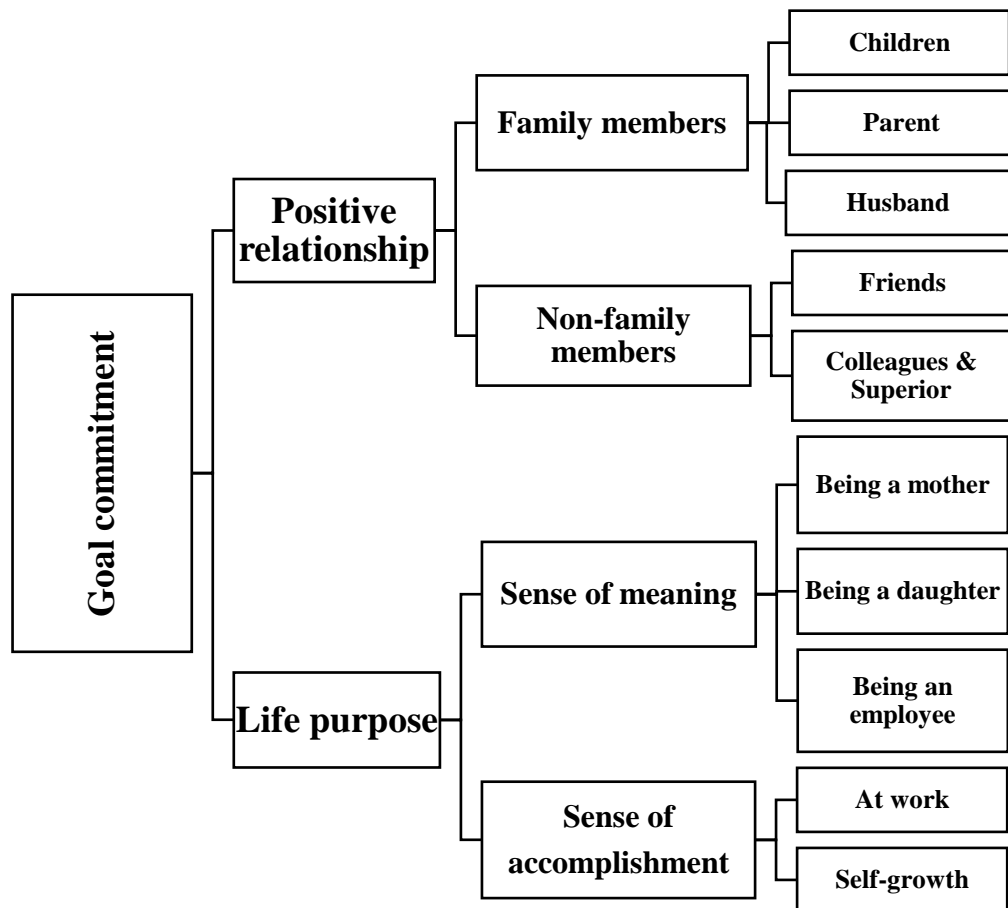
4.8.1 Overarching Theme: Goal Commitment

Participants are committed to develop positive relationships with family

members and non-family members. Such continuous commitment has been their individual's determination to extend effort throughout. From the data collected, some participants enjoy positive relationship while some were of the view that having positive relationship is a goal they are striving to work towards. The same goes with looking for life purpose. Some are on their path searching for life purpose that gives them a sense of meaning and sense of accomplishment, while some have either found theirs and, are active in their pursuit.

Figure 4.8:

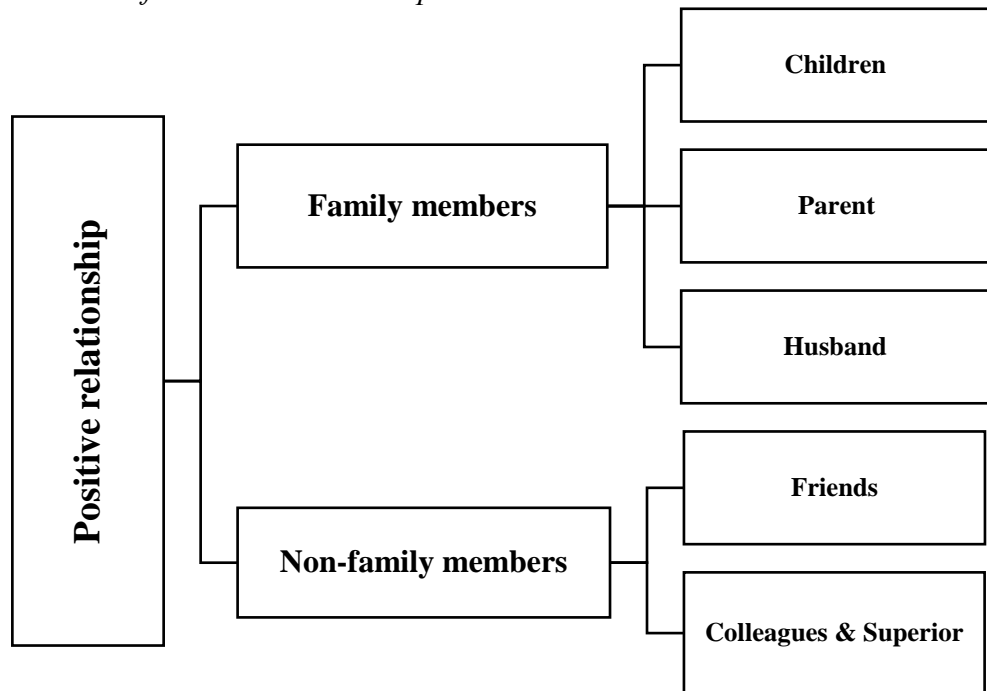
Overarching Theme of Goal Commitment



4.8.1.1 Theme 1: Positive Relationship. This theme consists of two subthemes - positive relationship with family members and positive relationship with non-family members. All 5 participants deemed having positive relationship with family members, parents, friends, and people around them as an essential component for their PWB. In this context, some participants have that while some others deemed it as goal that they are committed to work towards. For instance, P5 seeks to strengthen her positive relationship with her children.

Figure 4.9:

Theme 1 of Positive Relationship



4.8.1.1.1 Subtheme 1A: Positive Relationship with Family

Members. Positive relationships with family members consist of participants' husband, children, and parents.

4.8.1.1.2 Subtheme 1A(I): Positive Relationship with Children.

During the interview, P5 gave the impression that kids always have a reason for actions that displeases their parents. It might not be what parents consider a good reason, but it's what motivate their behaviour. Speaking of this, P5 sighed.

When you tell them this food doesn't suit you because got a lot of cili padi inside very spicy then they will say 'you think I cannot take spicy?' 'Why not I try first?' but after they tried already, they asked you 'why you didn't tell me that is so spicy until that level? So, it's like ... really, it's very difficult... Very challenging when you deal with them. There will never be a good or like perfect answer for them you know. You also have to increase your 'kungfu'. (P5)

Here, P5's commitment to her children is evident in how she tries to be patient and keep the communication going with them, even when they may be demanding, disobedient and unreasonable. From she shared here, she realized that to have a positive relationship with her children requires her to understand them better. When she mentioned 'you have to increase your kungfu', it showed she is committed to strengthen relationship with her children. 'Listening skill' could be a kind of 'kungfu' that she meant. Probably through listening and tolerating, these issues shall sweep aside.

Often, children won't be able to articulate what they're upset about. Probably because children just wanted to have a sense of security from the mother's loving presence while they vent their feelings of dissatisfaction by asking difficult questions to draw her attention. P5 wonders if it is because she is too busy with her work during weekdays. She would have to address the underlying needs behind her children's behaviour. Every child is unique, and it takes a different approach for each child to feel seen and loved.

Of course, it is not always easy when working mothers are stressed themselves. However, viewing through a positive perspective is unquestionably the cardinal rules of managing emotions with kids. That also explains why P5 aimed to increase her 'kungfu' in fostering a positive relationship with her children. Though she thinks she has not attained that level of closeness with her children, she is committed to work on the goal. That paves her way to her PWB. On the other hand, P2 wishes to spend more time for her children to strengthen their relationship too.

I will need to spend more time for kids. Usually, I spend my weekend time with them (kids) to communicate more, to tell them what parents are doing so they know what I am busy with. They will face a lot more challenges in the future when they are growing up. So, I would like to have more time to talk to them, to teach them. (P2)

This indicated P2 is really committed to communicate more with her children so she can have a positive relationship with them. Not only spending quality time with her children, but P2 is also committed to address their needs to better prepare them for future challenges. Hence, her statement above actually shows her commitment to foster positive relationship with her children. She is continuously working towards her goal.

4.8.1.1.3 Subtheme 1A(II): Positive Relationship with Parents.

Some other participants have experienced such positive relationships. P3 is one of the examples. She finds emotional support from visiting her parents during

the weekends, such regular visits brighten her day instantly, as it strengthens their family bonds and gives her greater happiness. Her remark below clearly explains how important the positive relationship between her, and her parents is.

I feel very happy when I visit my parent weekly. When I meet them, we gossip, 'makan' and watch movie together. Even though I just hop in nowhere, but the fun is there. (P3)

4.8.1.1.4 Subtheme 1A(III): Positive Relationship with Husband.

P2 also experienced positive relationship with her husband. She commented that if couples understand each other's job role, they will support each other where necessary. So, when she is busy with her night shift while her husband is having important meetings, her husband is willing to conduct the online meeting at home. Obviously, a happy couple makes for happy children. Being loved and loving in return, makes someone a happier and more cheerful person. This happiness is indubitably contagious as it can spill over to children. Hence, P2's statement below demonstrated the positive relationship between her, and her husband makes them understand each other. So, they will help each other whenever it is needed.

My husband needs to be on duty or have meeting at night, so we understand it's part of his work. So, when I'm busy with my work and my husband is having a meeting at night, usually he will do the meeting in the living hall so that he can have an eye on the children. (P2)

4.8.1.1.5 Subtheme 1B: Positive Relationship with Non-family

Members. Positive relationships with non-family members may consist of participants' close friends, colleagues, superiors and a circle of friends and acquaintances.

4.8.1.1.6 Sub-subtheme 1B(I): Positive Relationship with Friends.

Friends are vital, as they are people with whom one goes through life's journey in all its ups and downs. Speaking of this, P1 enjoys positive relationships with her friends. She said true friends give her emotional support and make her happy. Her statement below reflects how she cherishes her positive relationship with her friends, leading to a smoother life.

For me, making friends are very important. You need to have very positive friends; they will help you and you have your own healthy social life. Life will be going smoothly, you grow your business, grow your happiness." (P1)

On a separate note, P4 strongly agrees on the importance of having friends too. Her statement below shows she values the positive relationship that she has with her close friends. It simply makes her feel much supported, connected, and more motivated. Her colleague also revealed that P4 enjoys coming back to work on campus (after MCO), as she can have lunch with her colleagues.

Sometimes talk to my friends over the phone to share our life, it will help to release. So, it's good to have a few close friends that you can talk with. (P4)

While daily hassles may make working mothers feel down, friendship lights up their life and makes their hours spent much happier and more purposeful. P4's statement below indicates the positive relationship she has experienced with her acquaintances really makes her feel good.

Usually, it is not a bad idea to talk to other parents that you will share or also you will find out what your children doing or other children doing or their good friends doing. It's quite informative. You yourself and other mothers also can become good friends. (P4)

4.8.1.1.7 Subtheme 1B(II): Positive Relationship with Colleagues

and Superior. P1 has positive relationships with her colleagues and manager. That actually helped her to manage both work and family roles well. Her remark below that she is quite satisfied with her coping strategies these few years.

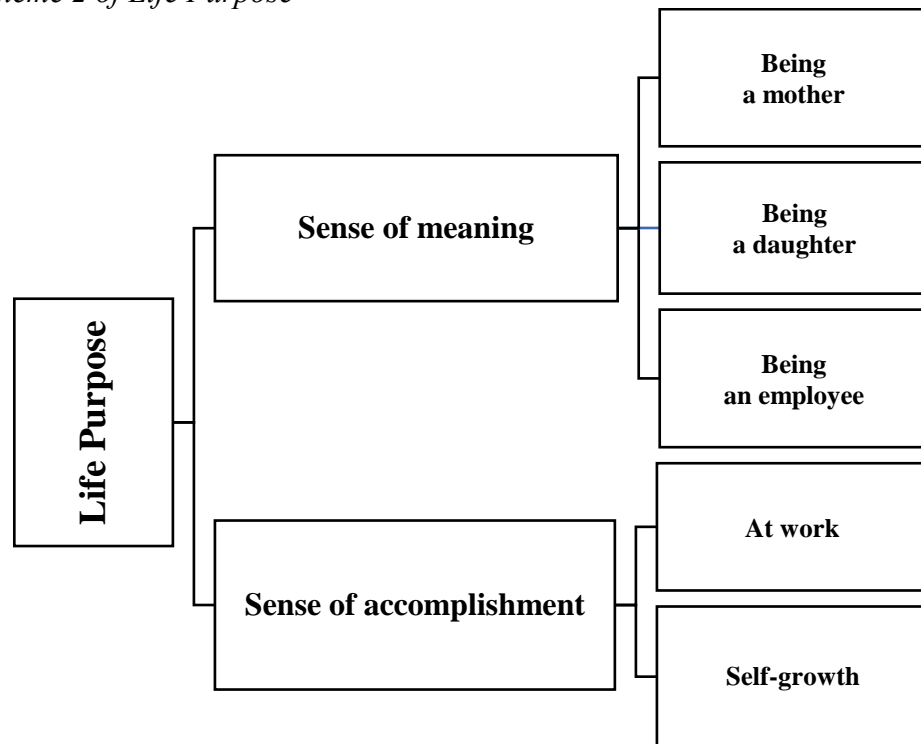
I have good relationship with my manager and my colleagues. I am quite satisfied these few years. I already tried very hard to adjust to all the roles that I have. For me it's balance. I have my own time, at least from family side, I don't have any complaints. To me, how to make it balance it's not how much you earn or how smart you are. It's how you create a very good relationship with the people around you. Especially those who are close with you. In a good relationship, everything will go smoothly, and everything will be going very well. (P1.)

P1's statement here actually shows the positive relationship that she experienced has been profoundly beneficial to her. To a certain extent, friends helped and supported her through the ups and downs of life. When she knew that she has good friends looking out for her, it's always easier to deal with the trials that life throws her way.

4.8.1.1.8 *Summary.* As discussed in Chapter 2, human beings are social creatures that are built to belong. They crave connection. The experiences shared by the participants have shown how high-quality connections give life purpose and meaning, it consequently leads to upward positive effects and add vital energy. Therefore, the positive relationship they have established with relevant parties were based on an agreed-upon commitment to one another that involves love, trust, and openness. Such relationships hence helped and supported them through the ups and downs of life. Essentially, the sense of commitment towards relationships somehow affects how participants feel about themselves and how they feel about their relationships with their family members and non-family members. Such positive relationship is profoundly beneficial for them especially in times of stress.

Figure 4.10:

Theme 2 of Life Purpose



4.8.1.2 Theme 2: Life Purpose. This theme consists of two subthemes, sense of meaning and sense of accomplishment. All five participants perceived that having a purpose created a positive impact in their life and foster elements of well-being. Fundamentally, this purpose consists of the central motivating aims of life. It is one's aspiration that motivates one's activities, such the reasons one gets up in the morning, the drives, that urges by which one sails through adversity. Such purpose is something that people search inwardly. To a large extent, it is sufficiently close to saying that in the absence of such 'purpose', life lacks meaning. Hence, the participants constantly have something to strive for. It's the sense of connectedness between themselves and the important moments that hold real weight in their lives. The contexts below are sufficiently close to

saying that in the absence of either, life lacks meaning. Hence, the participants constantly have something to strive for.

4.8.1.2.1 Subtheme 2A: Sense of Meaning. Our paradigms affect the way we interpret our world as humans. To a considerable extent, paradigm is a way of organizing and condensing information. If we understand the world better, we can live a more meaningful life. Beyond that, how a person views and defines what is meaningful is unique to that person.

4.8.1.2.2 Subtheme 2A(I): Being a Mother. P5 experienced her sense of meaning through being a mother. She explains even though she does not have work life balance yet, she is still satisfied. So where does such sense of meaning come from? As she knows kids are growing up fast, she cherishes every moment spent with them.

Though it's not balance but I am satisfied. Because some of the things is like precious moment that I can't always make it every day. So, it is a very precious moment. And I appreciate it. My kids are growing up, so the time is passing so fast. So, I will just spend more times with kids. I already have my own family. No matter how, family is the most important right. It is very different. (P5)

From P5's statement here, we can see she values her family more than her work. She rather spends more time with her family, realizing the fact that

kids are growing up fast and she got to cherish every little moment with them. To elaborate further, when she said, 'it is very different', it is obviously that 'family' is a significant element that she needs for a balanced and healthy sense of meaning in life. It is because her family and her children give her life more meaning, there is where the sense of meaning coming from. To certain extent, although the presence of her children did impose some kinds of impact on her overall life satisfaction and her day-to-day emotions, (bearing in mind the earlier example discussed where the endless questions from both her daughters were actually driving her crazy), however, it still brings an increased sense of meaning and purpose to her life, simply by being a mother.

Different from what P5 has experienced, P4 is committed to seek such sense of meaning being a mother. P4's colleague also said kids are her biggest concern. Between work and kids, P4 tends to focus on her kids a lot more. She is undoubtedly a homey person. As long as her kids are healthy, she will be very happy. That is her sense of meaning, being a mother.

However, as mentioned in RQ1, one of the challenges P4 encountered, is 'managing guilt'. She is attempting to be available for her children whenever possible. Yet, due to the fact that she is a full-time working mother, she thinks the time she spends with her children could have been more. Further, due to her core belief and her inner voice that is critical and judgmental, she is always left feeling inadequate. As such, she is committed to find meaning by striving to be

a better mother.

According to P4's colleague, P4 tries not to work during weekend but sometimes she still has to. Because she is studying her PhD, and it is quite hard for her to achieve work-life balance now. What she would do is to reserve time for family vacation. That probably explains P4's sense of being judged or even the ambivalence towards her roles. Concurrently, that is the goal that she is always striving to, which is to find meaning being a mother.

4.8.1.2.3 Subtheme 2A(II): Being a Daughter. P4 experienced sense of meaning being a daughter. Congruent with what is disclosed by her colleague, P4's parents will come to visit her occasionally. Whenever they are around, P4 will be busier as she needs to bring them for medical check-up and attend to some other requests by her parents.

Now my parents are also getting older. Now, they also need somebody to take care of them. So, this is also a daughter's job to take care of the elderly. That is another challenge. (P4)

What P4 shared here, is that she feels the obligation of being a filial daughter. Even though she could have been overwhelmed with her caregiving responsibilities which can take a physical and psychological toll on her, she also experiences the joys of being a caregiver. In this instance, her parents need her

care and be there for them. It is probably the meaning to feel needed, wanted, and the love between her and her parents are what keep her obliged in her role as a caregiver.

I am still mentally fit. I do not know what will happen next but at least at this moment. I am still fine. It is very important that you know the way to relax yourself ...and to release. So far so good. Satisfied. I think my coping strategies are sufficient. (P4)

So far, P4 is satisfied with her coping strategies. Her statement above actually showed while it may not be easy, but she is still willing to devote her energy as she is caring for her parents whom she loves. P4 is able to see the positive sides in her role, which is what gives her satisfaction and meaning in life. Probably she also enjoys the companionship of being together with her parents. That gives her life meaning.

4.8.1.2.4 Subtheme 2A(III): Being an Employee. Contrary to P4's case, P2 tends to dedicate more time on her work. From what is shared by her during the interview, it is not hard to see that she experienced her sense of meaning and purpose by being an employee. When asked whether work-life balance has been attained, P2 said she has not attained yet.

Even after work, I still receive messages from my boss for some work arrangement, so it is not so easy to achieve work-life balance. I will still reply to those messages, but I try not to disturb my other colleagues during non-working time. I dedicated my time more on work actually. (P2)

What P2 meant was she will still take up instructions from her boss even after working hours, but she will only delegate the tasks to respective colleagues when she is back to work on Monday. It is because her position as a deputy editor in her workplace demands her to shoulder additional responsibilities compared to other colleagues.

When she said, 'I dedicated my time more on work actually', this actually showed her willingness to contribute and serve her role at her best. Probably because she found her sense of meaning at work, hence she is committed to perform her work role well. If not, she would have quitted from her job already. (Bearing in mind the earlier discussion when P2 mentioned she has to work even after hours, especially during times of stock market slump or annual budget.) The management of the business desk is her main duty. She is responsible for ensuring that the publication is completed to quality standards as well as delegating assignments to those who report to her. Nevertheless, P2 still willingly trades such work expectations for her purpose and meaning in life.

Work-life balance is not easy. Some people might think is impossible. But how you define balance, it's actually by yourself. So, it's kind of learning process. As long as you are comfortable with it, then, that's the balance for you. (P2)

Apparently, P2 is making sense of her life and her roles in it. She sees the larger picture and recognizes her position in a broader scheme to bring herself

an insight and continue with her roles in her experience of meaning in life. She understands that to contribute efficiently and to serve her role optimally in her profession and in motherhood, everyone will have their own definition of work-life balance.

According to P2's close friend, P2 has to be on standby for the latest news at anytime, anywhere due to the nature of her job. As her son fell sick very often, it was so hard for her to take leave, being a deputy editor for business desk. Even so, she still continued with the job, probably because she wanted to better provide financially for her children. Along this journey, she keeps thinking what could be done to help her manage her roles better.

Now, P2 has managed to juggle between her work and family much better comparatively than in the past. Her friend links this to the meditation experience that P2 gained from her master. The practice of meditation has actually improved her entire quality of life. She feels that P2 is happier and healthier now. For P2, her life purpose is connected to her vocation—her work as a deputy editor proves her value and worth and that makes her feel good. That drives her to continue with her job despite the hardships she has been through.

4.8.1.2.5 *Subtheme 2B: Sense of Accomplishment.* Sense of accomplishment basically describes the sense of pride a person has for having

done something difficult and worthwhile. It offers an opportunity to grow into happiness and fulfilment. It also reflects a person's willingness to devote themselves exclusively to something that they personally find intrinsically rewarding and of value. Generally, these participants shared some similarities. They meticulously plan their days, make efforts to manage their roles, cherish the journey as they trudge along and are willing to embrace what life gives them. These traits can be seen in the earlier discussion where they shared how they cope in the face of challenges.

4.8.1.2.6 Subtheme 2B(I): At Work. Pertaining to this, P3 definitely experienced a greater sense of accomplishment at work. Due to her heavy workload, she mentioned that she will have to burn mid night oil quite often when the deadline draws near. But she only starts working on it when everyone is asleep.

Even when I bring my work back, I will start doing the work in the midnight when everybody is sleeping. Because I don't want to sacrifice any more time to spend with my family members. So, the only time I can sacrifice is my sleeping hours, my resting time. (P3)

Burning midnight oil after a long day is definitely not something easy. But why is she willing to sacrifice her sleep time to accomplish her work? It is obviously the sense of accomplishment she gained from her work. This rings true when she further described the following.

I have so much fun mingling with young people. I feel that I am attached to the constantly change society and I am 'growing' when I am working. So, I am quite happy even though I don't really think I have work-life balance. If I have less administrative work, then my work-life balance is better. But at least I try to balance. I think okay for me. (P3)

P3's remark here shows that she feels great completing all her tasks, as she finds it aligns with her personal sense of purpose. Her sense of commitment towards her goal is because she feels called to do it. And when she is doing it, she is completely focused and immersed, and it is almost equivalent to being in 'flow'. It simply gives her immense pleasure.

When something significant creates a sense of accomplishment, it serves as a powerful buffer of stress not only for P3 to build pride, satisfaction, and confidence, but also shape both her personal and professional positions. Notably, the sense of accomplishment that P3 derived from work, being a PhD holder in university, is her desire to realize her potential and appreciation for life. She further disclosed that she enjoys living in both worlds. She is attached to her job as much as to her family. And she is happy to collaborate with her colleagues and students.

Apparently, when she focuses on things bigger than herself, she tends to see something more significant instead of revolving around her own personal life only. Therefore, having a sense of meaning in the workplace is important to

her. It concerns her profoundly. That meaning not only impacts herself but also her professional reality as a whole.

4.8.1.2.7 Subtheme 2B(II): Self-growth. It isn't a one-size-fits-all goal though. Everyone will have to find their own unique ways to hear the inner wisdom that can help them achieve their life purpose. Speaking of this, P1's sense of accomplishment comes from her personal growth. She feels accomplished when she feels good about herself compared to past years and she is satisfied with what she did when she sees how she has improved.

Even though compared to few years back, I can see myself improved already but I think it is still not enough. To me, we are always not enough. Because I think I still have space to improve. So, every day you need to ask yourself which aspect you need to improve? You need to work on it. (P1)

P1's statement here clearly shows that she has derived a certain degree of accomplishment from her personal growth, yet she is not satisfied yet. It is still a goal that she is striving to work towards. Especially when she said 'every day you need to ask yourself which aspect you need to improve? You need to work on it.'

Apparently, a huge part of P1's sense of accomplishment could have been coming from her recognizing her limits in addition to focusing on her own

unique strengths — whether those involve practical skills, talents, or emotional insights. In other words, when she keeps practicing developing her skills, she finds herself improving over time. From there, she feels accomplished as she has managed to live her life the way she wants.

We need to reflect every day, see if any other things need improvement or any changes are needed, then you will be more happy. Rather than you just limit yourself. So, when you come out in this world, this society, you will find out more opportunities, it's not the small world that you think. I mean you can do much more and can do better than you think you are. (P1)

What P1 shared here actually indicated that she still wants to utilize her strengths to her best while taking steps to achieve her aspirations. Her statement here reflects her commitment in striving to reach her goal of achieving a greater sense of accomplishment from her personal growth.

Obviously, when she intrinsically yearns to create greater good, she is attempting to connect with her core value as a person and make meaning from the world around her. That is to say, she has her sense of accomplishment when she dedicates her lives to a mission or a deeper purpose. Yet, she is always striving to work to become her best self.

4.8.1.2.8 *Summary.* To sum up, life purpose is the inner calling that lights participant up from the inside and stays alight. When someone does something they like, they find themselves in a state where they can dip in and out of, it's just like being in the flow. To reiterate, such continuous goal of commitment is an individual's pursuit and determination to extend effort throughout the 'play'. Rather than just fulfil and maintain the condition at a specific point in the 'gameplay', it is more on a sustainable pursuit of PWB. Hence, the working mothers have to pause and reflect where necessary, to constantly check whether needs are met, and values are aligned so they can feel truly prosperous.

4.9 Conclusion

Basically, the findings above have answered the research questions. In brief, working mothers, despite the challenges they met, they need to always remember their own personal needs and desires (rather than those of others). After all, they ought to recover some focus back on themselves. For instance, it doesn't matter whether it's an uninterrupted block of time or a fragmented time, provided that chunk of time is dedicated for themselves, such acts of self-kindness can go a long way in decreasing their feelings of exhaustion, burnout, and stress that they often feel in tackling a slew of work and family demands every day.

In light of this, the participants' willingness to continue learning and make improvements in their role as a working enable them to provide the best not only for themselves, and both family and work domains. Their ability to grow in a sustainable manner makes them more passionate in living their lives. For instance, by having self-management, working mothers would be able to achieve PWB and hence contribute optimally to their roles. Ultimately, the key for working mothers to be at their best is to take care of their PWB the way they take care of their physical and mental health, through conscious choices they make on a daily basis. So, for them to stay on a better path, if they keep looking for 'choices', they can always find trail marks to beckon them onward to a more rewarding life. They will finally find themselves in a whole new landscape.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Based on the themes and sub-themes found in Chapter 4, the findings interpretation and discussion begin with RO 1 that examined the challenges that faced by the participants of the present study, followed by RO 2 that discussed the coping strategies employed and subsequently RO 3 that probed into participants' perceptions on PWB after the coping strategies were employed. Indeed, the experience of interviewing all 5 participants was insightful. I felt truly privileged to have the opportunity to get a glimpse of these working mothers' real-life experiences, and how their challenges, coping strategies and their PWB have shaped them.

5.2 Challenges

Challenges here indicated the difficulties encountered by the participants when they balance their roles in both family and work domains. Overall, all five participants in my study reporting having experienced challenges dealing with various demands while at work and at home. To make both ends meet is indeed hard for them. This is consistent with a study conducted by Ajala (2017) who noted that a typical working mother experiences conflicting role expectations in

both work and family domains, having to manage their work, their children, and other related domestic obligations simultaneously. According to Afrida (2021), such work-family spillover may happen as a result of juggling multiple responsibilities. The pressures are prone to have an impact on working mothers' PWB too. Thus, my findings are crucial to ascertain that working mothers' main challenge is springing from their multiple roles and responsibilities having to managing time, energy, social expectation as well as sense of guilt.

5.2.1 Managing Time

Basically, Figure 4.1 shown in Chapter 4 has clearly revealed the challenges the participants encountered in balancing their roles in both family and work domains. All the participants described their hectic schedule, heavy responsibilities, and overwhelming workload, 'multiple roles and responsibilities' appeared to be the main challenge that bothered them the most. In this respect, past studies have also highlighted similar concerns that such multiple roles are enervating to working mothers (Kang & Jang, 2020).

In fact, how can working mothers manage their time more efficiently when they have so many roles and tasks to handle? The participants hence indicated that time poverty is another issue they face. All of them complained that there are simply not enough hours in a day considering the needs to accomplish all the expected work, childcare and domestic demands. Such finding is consistent with Rendon (2016)'s study that time constraint is, indeed,

an arduous challenge for working mothers.

5.2.2 Managing Energy

My finding has also disclosed working mothers' challenges were linked to feelings of exhaustion and sleep deprivation. For instance, when P3 said she used to sleep as late as 3 am and wake up as early as 6 am due to tight deadline, this is somehow congruent with a study carried out by Ravindranath et al. (2021) who posited that working mothers tend to have little or no time to take care of themselves.

Having to handle multiple roles and responsibilities becomes a point of stress and exhaustion. Rendon (2016) found that working mothers believe they can fulfil all of their responsibilities, but just at the expense of exhaustion with minimal or barely enough time for themselves. Apparently, the participants in this study expressed their roles as exhausting. Needing to juggle between both family and work literally consumed nearly all of their energy each day.

5.2.3 Managing Social Expectations

In view of a study conducted by Borelli et al (2017) that described working mothers need to do more in comparison to their spouse due to social expectation, participants in the present study also shared similar concern. As mentioned in Chapter 2, cultural context to a large extent, shapes the types of

stressors that an individual is likely to experience. Malaysians, according to social psychologist Gerard Hendrik Hofstede, are collectivistic in nature. In relation to having 'collectivistic' values, 'we' is more important than 'I', while group interests are far more important than the individual interests (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). In essence, collectivism seeks to give priority to group goals over individual goals as it encourages conformity and discourages individuals from standing out. These value orientations are also reflected in mothering goals.

As explained in Chapter 2, in a working mother's context, the family needs are treated as top priority, whereas their PWB comes as secondary. Due to gendered norms and societal pressure, mothers tend to have increased expectations of family responsibilities in comparison to their spouses. As collectivism perpetually perceives 'family' and 'children' as a woman's domain, working mothers, hence, tend to be judged and criticized for 'missing out' on such obligations (Borelli et al., 2017).

While opposed to an individualistic culture like what has been discussed in the British context, a collectivistic culture in working mothers' context in Malaysia is more likely to prioritize family needs (Sumari et al., 2019). That being so, the findings of my study seem to suggest that the participants are collectivistic in nature. This can be seen from them waking up early and sleeping late in order to fulfil both work and family commitments. If they prioritize their needs over others, they will certainly dedicate more time to self-care and self-

love. If so, they will barely have issues like time poverty, energy drain and so on.

It is obvious that working mothers' experiences have reflected how societal expectations have held them responsible as both mothers and professionals. The upbringing of their children is one of those, where a woman has to live up to specific expectations and standards imposed on them as a mother. Does that really mean they should have done more?

Dwelling further on this, mothering can be seen as a set of cultural practices that reflect values and norms which are consistent with and adaptive to the surrounding environment (Bian, Q., et al., 2022). That also means that when the environment changes, cultural values and parenting behaviours also change in order to adapt. Thus, it is fair to postulate that sociodemographic changes have somehow influenced our culture to shift from more collectivistic to more individualistic in both values and practices across the world.

Thus, the data in my study seems to suggest the elements of individualism have been inculcated when participants shared about spending me-time as one of the coping strategies to deal with their stress. For instance, when P1 said she goes to a hot spring and P2 said she practices meditation. That actually provides them with greater confidence in dealing with their stressful

situations positively rather than reacting vehemently to them.

Therefore, a changing society has somehow constructed new childrearing values and practices that reflect adaptation to rapid social change and hence, alter participants' parenting values and mothering practices in an individualistic direction. By way of spending 'me-time' as a coping strategy, the participants have started to demonstrate gradually individualistic culture by allocating a little time for themselves.

5.2.4 *Managing Guilt*

From the data collected, social expectation which has been discussed above, is not only taking a great toll on working mothers, but also pushing them to strive harder every day to do more, to take on more, and to fulfil more needs. Speaking of this, when P3 said, "I feel bad" and P4 said, "You feel guilty to your children" have somehow hinted that they feel the need to be 'perfect' all the time. This subsequently caused a constant tension between being a 'good' mother and doing what they believed to be expected of them. Such findings resonate well with a study conducted by Berger et al., (2020) that noted working mother's sense of guilt. In light of the challenges faced, how do working mothers rise up to manage the demands that straddle work, home, and children?

5.3 Coping Strategies

The focus of my study which sought to investigate the participants' views on their choices of coping strategies in face of the challenges encountered have led to some interesting findings. As discussed in Chapter 2, the commonly used coping strategies are spousal cooperation (Craig & Churchill, 2020), family support (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Leung et al., 2019), domestic help (Rahman et al., 2016), emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and problem-focused coping (Carver et al., 1989).

5.3.1 Self-management

Whereas from my findings, all the participants were agreeable that self-management appeared to be the main coping strategy employed in face of the challenges. Under the context of self-management, making choice comes into play where they choose to spend 'me-time' to immerse in their favourite activities, setting boundaries between both domains, making plans, and being disciplined, setting priority as well as seeking support. All these have helped them to ease some of their stress.

In brief, self-management rises as a coping method for the participants appeared to be quite effective, considering it serves as a buffer against the stress and chaos experienced by them. A better self-management actually gives them structure and a routine, enables them to stay focused, and help reduce the time spent on decision-making on daily basis. According to them, self-management

helps them to manage their time more efficiently and have better days, give them a better degree of control, and help them to create time for some other needs.

As they become well aware of what their stressors are, they would be able to manage and live an optimal life. Also, when they equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills, they know better what to do and use their strengths in a way that maximize their output. For instance, P1 cut down her daily appointment and engaged transportation service for her children so she can reserve some time for herself. Prioritizing and delegating hence help her to manage and live an optimal life. This is consistent with a study conducted by Ofei et al (2018) who discovered that time management and priority setting would help working mothers to better cope with the demands required.

5.3.2 Making Choices

Based on the gathered responses, it is deduced that the participants in my study who shared their views on the challenges faced, have endeavoured to making choice in their attempt to cope with their daily demands. Thus, as mentioned above, within the context of self-management, making choices come into play where participants recognize values and priorities corresponding with the resulting strength and weaknesses of their actions. Only when they know their rights and manage themselves well, they feel empowered. With this in mind, they learn to make certain choices in spending personal time ('me-time') for

themselves, setting boundaries, making plans, and being disciplined, prioritizing, and seeking support in dealing with specific demands.

With regards to spending personal time ('me-time'), whether it is an uninterrupted block of 'me-time' or fragmented 'me-time,' as long as they have reserved time for themselves, it enables them to cope with the challenges they encounter. At the same time, addressing their work or motherly guilt could be the best way a working mother copes with an unfair or burdensome environment, as reflective self-examination of expectations and beliefs which is essential for them to build awareness of the greater social context.

Having that in mind, it is crucial not only to increase working mothers' awareness and explore possible sources of work support and opportunities to safeguard their protective factors, but also for them to think through and question those embedded beliefs and demands that society places on them as well as their adherence to those cultural messages, and how it impacts their life (Gridiron, 2017).

Whereas for seeking support, the participants generally mentioned family and non-family members, and women friendly work culture in their support network helped them tremendously. Essentially, such support systems strengthened their ability and capability to handle both work and family demands.

For instance, P1, P2 and P4 enlist family members who help out around the house by dividing tasks among them. The fact they delegate the more demanding tasks to adults (husband or domestic assistant), assigning smaller and less physically consuming tasks to children (like what P4 was doing) not only enhances the teamwork in the family. Constantly sharing chores may also become second nature for parties to make decisions in other areas jointly. Such actions will then be a primary determinant of how children think and behave, so they get to learn good values about team spirit, fairness, and empathy, hence shaping them in a positive way.

With work and home domains often overlapping due to time constraints, it is particularly important to manage priorities and set boundaries (Gragnano et al., 2020). In fact, working mothers need to be better at defining their working hours once they are done for the day. For instance, they opted not to bring their work home unless they had extremely urgent deadlines to meet (like what P3 was doing). This is to ensure they can mentally check out from work and reserve some time to spend with their family and other household responsibilities while they are home. So long as they make a choice to stop letting the weight of the world on their shoulders, it would pave the way for a better PWB.

5.4 Psychological Wellbeing (PWB)

From the data collected, one of the attributes that the participants in my study had in common is that ‘work-life balance has not been attained despite

numerous efforts they made, and yet, they still think it is fine for them.’ Overall, they posited that work-life balance is not always practical, nor is it attainable, as everyone has a separate set of expectations about what balancing family life and work will entail. A study conducted by Rose (2017) also shows working mothers reported having a tough time balancing their family and work lives.

Work-life imbalance may prevent working mothers from reaching their full potential. If working mothers constitute the skills to cope with various demands in both domains, the effect of stress can be lessened, and their stress experiences can be alleviated. While the participants acknowledged that finding equilibrium between work and family lives is indubitably a hurdle that they take forever to overcome, this has somehow prompted them to be creative and find ways to develop useful skills or make the most of their time.

Following that, the participants claimed that they have done what is best for their families and work by making efforts to set boundaries between the two domains. Their perseverance is indeed evident in the real-life experience shared by them in the interview. For instance, they shared about their commitment to develop positive relationships with family members and non-family members as well as the commitment to pursue life purpose that gives them the sense of meaning and sense of accomplishment. These indeed helped them generating positive responses to their challenging situations and hence securing a better PWB.

Such continuous commitment is an individual's determination to extend effort throughout. Rather than just fulfil and maintain the condition at a specific point, it is a more sustainable pursuit of PWB. Thus, some participants enjoy positive relationship while some were of the view that having positive relationship is a goal they are striving to work towards. The same goes with looking for life purpose. Some are on their path searching for life purpose that gives them a sense of meaning and sense of accomplishment, while some have either found theirs and, are active in their pursuit.

As discussed in Chapter 2, positive relationship is one of the core elements in PERMA model of wellbeing. As participants opined that such element made them feel good, it is actually consistent with the findings that connecting with others is fundamental to someone's personal well-being (Mertika et al., 2020). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that working mothers who have positive relationship may perceive a lower degree of conflict which can reduce adverse health symptoms physically, mentally, and emotionally and therefore have higher PWB (Zhou et al., 2018).

Besides positive relationship, as mentioned above, the participants also shared about their commitment to pursue life purpose as they perceived that having a life purpose created a positive impact in their life and fostered elements of well-being. That is also another vital component (in PERMA model) that makes them feel more engaged at completing tasks and experience greater

satisfaction.

This can hence explain why all the participants posited that even though work-life balance has not been achieved yet, they are still able to find satisfaction (some in work domain while some in family domain). It is postulated that they are doing the best they can in both domains which feeds into their needs in achieving a desirable state in both family and work life.

5.5 Theoretical Implication

As delineated in Chapter 2, my study employed Lazarus and Folkman's TTSC theory and PERMA theory of wellbeing to explain the data. According to Lazarus' theory, there are three strategies – emotion-oriented, problem-oriented and reassessment. That indeed offers meaning to working mothers' stressful experiences and the resources needed to help them better cope with their commitments in both family and work domains. For instance, if the excessive role demands exceeding their perceived abilities, they will adopt certain coping techniques to deal with stress and resolve challenges.

While RQ 1 examined the challenges of the participants, and RQ 2 explored the coping strategies of the participants. From theoretical aspect, with reference to what TTSC theory has suggested, there are three types of stress management which will subsequently influence the decisions for coping

strategies. As mentioned in Chapter 2, according to the definition given by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping strategies are the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.

In working mothers' context, in face of the challenges encountered, TTSC explained the coping outcomes of participants when they used emotion-oriented strategies by making choices to spend personal time ('me time') to reduce their emotional upsets by managing the demands caused by stressful situations. For example, by managing their emotional distress through minimization, P1 cutting down her daily appointment to reserve some 'me-time' for herself. On the other hand, P2 allows selective attention by practicing meditation to help her calm her mind while seeking for some solutions.

Additionally, the participants managed to control and adapt to their problematic situations too. They seek support in relevant domains in handling their challenges through some problem-oriented way. Besides, they also perform a reassessment on the stress level they encountered, but also demonstrated a deeper level by developing their emotional resilience in managing stress. When they reassessed the situation that they were facing, they evaluated their emotion and level of stress. That was how their challenges were dealt in an assessment-oriented way through making choices in setting boundary, making plans, and being disciplined, and prioritizing.

Basically, they started with tiny changes in their routine to help build resilience to stressful circumstances either by spending ‘me-time’ for themselves, engaging in physical activity (exercise) or participating in relaxing activities. Taking P2 as an example, by practicing meditation, she managed to see problems through a different lens to boost resilience and get better at relieving stress. P1, P3, P4 and P5 on the other hand, staying connected with family, friends, and groups in their life to bolster their resilience.

As relationship creates love and trust, offers encouragement and reassurance. Such coping works well for a better PWB. In other words, the coping strategies employed somehow increased their resilience in face of their challenges. This can explain why they take pride in doing what they deemed more important to them. It is a result of working towards and reaching their desired goals. This can also explain why they have the intrinsic motivation such as sense of meaning and sense of accomplishment to work diligently and accomplish what they set out to do. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the findings are consistent with what suggested in PERMA Theory of wellbeing (Sharma, 2016).

As reiterated, well-being is a multifaceted concept understood as a combination of feeling good, finding ‘flow’, having a purposeful life, establishing of authentic connections, and having a sense of accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Subsequently, when the PERMA model is integrated and

applied by working mothers in their daily life in a large number of settings, they are able to obtain their PWB. While from the data collected, participants have demonstrated a deeper level of psychological resilience and coping that further enable them to cope more effectively and confidently with adversities occurring during stressful periods.

Thus, when the challenges they faced require them to adjust and to adapt, as well as to tolerate negative realities, coping helps them adjust to various demands, which requires giving a greater effort and using greater energy than what is needed in the daily routines of life, there's where resilience comes into play. As higher levels of resilience-based coping leads to increased PWB, participants' PWB hence becomes more sustainable, and flourishing takes place.

With that in mind, parties can use the model to help working mothers utilize their strengths to achieve both individual and collective well-being through thriving. This is the ultimate goal of the study that aims for both individuals and communities to thrive. In other words, a solution is achieved where everyone benefits. Not only for the working mothers themselves, but also for the family, the entire organization as well as the larger society.

5.6 Practical Implication

As indicated, my study seeks to examine the challenges faced by working mothers when balancing roles between work and family. As it revealed the key challenges and the impact those challenges had on them, it also explores the coping strategies and their perceptions on their PWB after the coping strategies were employed. Hence, these first-hand perspectives would be able to serve as a basis to re-evaluate the core values that working mothers are currently holding whether it supports their PWB. Fundamentally, working mothers need to have more awareness of the importance of self-care to understand their need for adequate rest and its significance.

For example, sleep deprivation (as mentioned by P3) is an issue among many other working mothers who have infants or young children. Therefore, they will have to allow more mental rest and time to promote personal coping behaviours. Pertaining to this, policymakers in the organizations should highly encourage working mothers to take annual leave and goes for breaks whenever needed. On the other hand, family members including husband or children should attempt to assist working mothers with daily domestic tasks too. This shall then strengthen the family bonds as everyone who is participative in performing the domestic obligations would better comprehend the situations and responsibilities faced by working mothers. This will in turn give working mothers a sense of togetherness and thereby reduce their stress levels. Indeed, such kind of support from the organization and family would play a key role to

provide valuable resources that aim towards the development of working mothers' healthy lifestyle and a positive attitude.

From a practical aspect, the significant finding can contribute to the development of policies to support working mothers. For instance, the participants in education industry have shared their concerns that impacted their PWB when balancing roles in both domains. In other words, my study's findings can be served as a yardstick for more other organizations when creating employee policies, to make it attractive as part of their competitive corporate strategy if they were to hire working mothers to join their team. Government bodies and organizations can also view my study's findings as useful when introducing and implementing work-life balance policies in the future. Without governments' support, working mothers' effective work-life policies may not be pursued seriously with such care and detail.

In an Asian context, being a mother is a lifelong responsibility. It is an unending cycle of being a protector, a friend, a disciplinarian of her child or children. Why is working mother's PWB an important consideration for everyone? It is not only for the sake of working mothers themselves as individuals, but rather, for the wellbeing of everyone. Given that the increase of positive development of the children comes from the mother who nurtures her children, if the PWB of working mothers can be improved and made to thrive, they will have optimal outcomes in respect of physical health, better individual

performance at work, better self-regulation and stress management and higher life satisfaction (Ruggeri et al., 2020).

With this in mind, encouraging couples' counselling in which communication between the couple are addressed, can be important. As it would allow working mothers to express their feelings towards the challenges they experience and not just keep their struggles to themselves. Couples' counselling will give working mother a safe channel in which they can let their spouses be part of their pursuit of self-care. On a separate note, Bakker, and de Vries, (2021) also posited that organizational resources such as human resource practices may include having a counselling unit in the organization to help working mothers to cope with stress more gracefully. Such idea could also be adopted in the current working environment to give birth to a thriving workplace culture with happier and committed working mothers.

Overall, an improved sense of well-being makes working mothers more present, more resilient, and more focused at home and at work. If they are able to manage the family role effectively, they will certainly dedicate more time and efforts toward work (Anwar et al., 2017). Therefore, the findings from this study can also prompt society to hold workshops for working mothers, so they will have an increased awareness and simultaneously be given some self-care ideas that contribute towards their PWB. Such workshops may facilitate and communicate messages of better self-management and decision making to

enable working mothers to cull through societal expectations, personal expectations, and daily realities in handling multiple responsibilities of career and motherhood more confidently.

To access a larger perspective from which to identify and implement solutions to alleviate challenges, working mothers must be aware of their needs to go align with their personal value espoused by the society to be able to manage the demands, requirements, and priorities more effectively. This awareness is important so they will be sensitive to their needs and PWB.

5.7 Novelty and Implications

To evaluate novelty, it is to examine the similarities and differences, compatibilities, and incompatibilities between elements (Berlyne, 1960). That being so, my study findings have revealed some similarities from the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2. In contrast, what is novel from the findings of my study? The coping strategies employed by the participants seem to be different from the existing literature discussed. As indicated, some researchers described the coping strategies adopted by working mothers included positive reinterpretation, growth-oriented experience, seeking social support, proactive coping, religious coping, suppression of competitive activities and planning (Rajgariah et.al., 2020).

However, for participants in my study, self-management that gives them routine and structure, and better sense of control, appeared to be their personal method in coping with their challenges. Within the context of self-management, making choices come into play where participants know their rights better, redefine their roles by negotiating their roles, hence manage themselves well, and ultimately empower themselves.

For example, the participants make choices by spending 'me-time' to reduce their emotional upsets. In such manner, they are able to manage the work and family demands caused by stressful situations. This was how their stress is dealt in an emotion-oriented way. After the 'me-time', their emotion and level of stress could be different as they reassess the situation that they were facing. This was how their stress is dealt in an assessment-oriented way. On the other hand, when they are making conscious effort to control and adapt to problematic situations by taking action to set, make plan and be disciplined, prioritize, and seek support. This was how their stress is dealt in a problem-oriented way. Such findings are something different from what has been derived from the past studies.

Moving forward, in respect to PWB, all participants unanimously agreed that it is fine with them despite the fact that work-life balance is not achieved yet. This is something new compared to the past studies that linked lacks work-life balance with decreased life satisfaction. When probed further, it was the life

purpose and positive relationship that gives them joy, engagement, sense of meaning and sense of accomplishment. These elements were suggested in PERMA model of well-being by Martin Seligman.

5.8 Limitations

My qualitative study was designed to collect information relating to working mothers' experiences in the private sector in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The age of the participants ranged from 40 to 44 only. Hence, the diversity or differences due to age, occupation, position in the organization, social status and family size were limited in this study.

The experiences of the participants here might share some similarities as they are all managerial employees. Meanwhile the experiences of working mothers in the entire society can vary and differ widely. In fact, I attempted to recruit working mothers from different age groups and diverse work contexts. However, a very low proportion of working mothers' willingness to participate in the study has indeed limited my intention.

As discussed earlier, my qualitative research has been conducted on a particular set of population that has their own unique demographic, psychological and sociological characteristics. Since the participants were recruited using purposive sampling, and the nature of the small sample selected

was meant to meet the inclusion criteria which have been set out in the study, their experience may be distinctive and exclusive.

Speaking of this, all 5 participants in my study have indicated that their husbands are one of their greatest sources of emotional support. Their experiences may be unique and different from other working women who do not have spousal support. While lacking spousal support may influence participants' decision in choosing coping strategies, it may also cause difference in participants' perceptions on PWB. Hence, my study has yet to fully examine how challenging working mothers' lives would be without spousal support.

Furthermore, my study focuses on the point of view of the working mothers who define their challenges based on their personal experiences while the point of view of their family members or colleagues are not captured yet. Considering the accounts of the participants represent their subjective experiences and coping strategies, their perspectives may not represent other community groups of working mothers. This has simultaneously caused the generalizability a little hard to achieve at times due to potential sampling bias. In other words, the findings may not be generalizable to other similar situation in a broader sense.

Also, my study is also limited by the decisions within research design (case study) and research methodology (qualitative which is inherently subjective) which could be limited in covering differences in interpretations. As for my research design, case study by its nature can be hard to generalize outside the boundaries of its sample. As my study employed in-depth interviews to collect data, ideally speaking, when I employ more than one method to collect the data and check the results of each method against each other, it could give an edge to present the findings more confidently, so the results of such study will be more generalizable. However, by using more than one data collection tool in research, it can be challenging too. In reality, not all data collection tools complement each other. Some data collection tools are not complementary but in fact, more in competition with each other, which may cause the data analysis to become incredibly difficult.

Moving forward, as reflected in Chapter 2, the coping strategies of the working mothers are different in different cultural contexts. For instance, the working mothers from the collectivist culture of Nigeria and the individualist culture of British did adopt different coping strategies to deal with their family and work demands. Their challenges can also be different considering the fact that they are coming from different cultural backgrounds that accommodates a rich variety of beliefs and values.

Likewise, Malaysia is a diverse country that contains different ethnicities and religions. People from each ethnicity may retain their ancestors' cultural customs to certain extents. Taking into account that the scope of my study is limited to the context of the working mothers coming from Chinese background situated in Klang Valley, Malaysia, if applied to other settings or ethnicity, these findings may yield limited insights. Although all ethnicities in Malaysia embody collectivistic values, it is uncertain how specific cultural elements in each ethnicity may cast an impact on the degree of gender roles and differences in each cultural community. However, such limitations have opened the door for future research.

In brief, different set of challenges that encountered by working mothers from different cultural community may influence their coping strategies and their perceptions on PWB. Yet, my study did not go deeper as to whether any slight shift or transition from collectivism to individualism is in place due to socioeconomic growth, education, or mass media. This has in turn given rise to important questions like: 'Do ethnic differences influence coping strategies and participants' perceptions on PWB? Are there any changes in value? If so, in which directions and to what extents?'

5.9 Recommendations

As my current data collection only restricted to participants situated in Klang Valley Malaysia, future studies should consider the demographics from

various locations to enrich the data by getting a greater diversity of voices about challenges encountered by working mothers and the coping strategies employed to maintain their PWB. For instance, it can be expanded to other geographical regions in Malaysia, not just restricted to Klang Valley of Malaysia.

Besides, future research can also consider investigating working mothers working in government sector. In terms of the locality of participants, the researcher can explore a wider sampling size with wider range of employment by recruiting entry-level employees or non-management personnel as participants, as they may have different concerns and viewpoints in regards of the challenges they faced, coping strategies they employed and their perceptions on PWB.

Considering the participants of the current study are married employees who have husband's support and help in handling their roles and responsibilities, interviewing working mothers who are self-employed, divorced or who does not have a husband or partner (single mother) could shed a different light. The challenges they face, the support systems they seek, and the strategies they employ may also be different as the type of commitment they have towards their jobs varies. The wider sampling frame can also extend to participants of different age groups. That remains another area to be explored in the future study.

As a broader group of working mothers from a younger age could be interviewed in a survey format, about the benefits and struggles they have experienced as working mothers. As such, new age employed mothers can draw on the relevant experiences and advocate this approach to turn challenges to their advantage. So, more working mothers can find ways to achieve a harmonious balance in work and family-related spheres of their lives which could ultimately benefit not only themselves, but also their family and the community as a whole.

Another recommendation would be to investigate the experiences of the participants' spouses in examining the challenges they indicated. The perspective from their spouses can be explored to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

Last but not least, as stated above, the participants from my present study are all coming from Chinese backgrounds. This somehow facilitates a continued openness to further examine whether different culture (to certain respects) can influence participant's view on the subject matter. Probably by recruiting participants from Malay or Indian communities would allow the future researchers to investigate and compare whether working mothers from different cultural community would have different sets of challenges and coping strategies as well as varied perceptions on PWB considering the cultural norms, belief systems and values are diverse from each other. The awareness of similarities and differences should be able to help more working mothers to better

understand themselves and their deepest needs. So, further research that aims to examine potential similarities and differences in this regard would be fruitful.

5.10 Conclusion

A supportive and cooperative family can do wonders for working mothers' overall happiness and well-being. However, sometimes, it is not just children and career that make it hard for them. Instead, the social pressure and cultural expectations imposed on them (to be both great mothers and high-performing employees) at the same time that make it virtually insurmountable.

So, the core question is: "Can working mothers continue to do their best without sufficient support and resources?" It is obvious that an increasing social awareness and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced would definitely facilitate initiatives for the PWB among working mothers. Hence, my study's findings can contribute to the development of work-life balance policies to support them both personally and professionally. By any means, it starts with a thriving individual for each working mother to grow outward to support the collective flourishing of the entire family and the workplace. That being the case, they could find ways to achieve a better or harmonious balance in work and family-related spheres of their lives. This shall lead to a more sustainable pursuit of PWB.

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APPENDIX A

Ethical Approval for Dissertation



UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN DU012(A)

Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation Co. No. 578227-M

Re: U/SERC/143/2022

8 July 2022

Pn Wirawahida Binti Kamarul Zaman
Department of Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat
31900 Kampar, Perak

Dear Pn Wirawahida,

Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to your application for ethical approval for your research project (Master student's project) and are pleased to inform you that your application has been approved under Expedited Review.

The details of your research project are as follows:

Research Title	An Exploratory Study on Challenges, Coping Strategies and Psychological Well-being of Working Mothers in Malaysia
Investigator(s)	Pn Wirawahida Binti Kamarul Zaman Ms Lee Wan Ying Lim Lee Chun (UTAR Postgraduate Student)
Research Area	Social Sciences
Research Location	Klang Valley
No of Participants	5 participants (Age: 25 - 54)
Research Costs	Self-funded
Approval Validity	8 July 2022 - 7 July 2023

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

- (1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research,
- (2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and
- (3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.
- (4) Written consent be obtained from the institution(s)/company(ies) in which the physical or/and online survey will be carried out, prior to the commencement of the research.

Kampar Campus : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia
Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 466 1313
Sungai Long Campus : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8868
Website: www.utar.edu.my



Should you collect personal data of participants in your study, please have the participants sign the attached Personal Data Protection Statement for your records.

The University wishes you all the best in your research.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Ts Dr Faiz bin Abd Rahman

Chairman

UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee

c.c Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science
 Director, Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research

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APPENDIX B

Content Validation for Expert Review dated 31 July 2022



FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
 MASTER OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY (MIOP)
 MAPC 11100 Dissertation

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Form Title: Content Validation for Expert's Review

Name of Candidate	LIM LEE CHUN
ID Number	21AAM02126
Thesis/ Dissertation on Title	An exploratory study on challenges, coping strategies and psychological wellbeing among working mothers in Malaysia

(A) The expert will tick (/) in the column where:

3	Question is clear and essential
2	Question is not clear and needs revision
1	Question is not essential

(B) The expert will provide comment/ remark if necessary.

Information sheet containing basic information of demographic profile such as participants' age, relationship status, current occupation etc. will be sent for them to fill up before the interview starts. Whereas questions to obtain participants' background information are as follow:

1. How do you perceive your role as a working mother?
2. What kind of expectation your work has on you?
3. What kind of expectation your family has on you?

No	Question	1	2	3
1.	How do you perceive your role as a working mother?			/
	Remark (if any):			
2.	What kind of expectations your work has on you?		/	
	Remark (if any): Refer to Word document on question structure			
3.	What kind of expectation your family has on you?		/	
	Remark (if any): Refer to Word document on question structure			

RQ	Question	1	2	3
1	What are the challenges working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family?			
	Remark (if any):			
	What are the challenges you face in handling work and home responsibilities?			
	Remark (if any): Is ok, but just another suggestion of question structure for consideration			/
	Before marriage How is your personal life before marriage?			/
	Remark (if any):			
	How is your work life before marriage?			/
	Remark (if any):			
	After marriage, before having children (this is the phase of reflection, in my remark) How is your family life before having children?			/
	Remark (if any): Ok, provided you notify them about the different phases of reflection before asking them question			
	How is your work life before having children?			/
	Remark (if any):			
	After marriage and having children How is your family life after having children?			/
	Remark (if any):			
	How is your work life after having children?			/
	Remark (if any):			

RQ	Question	1	2	3
2	What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges at both work and family domains?			
	Remark (if any):			
	What do you do when you feel overwhelmed by your workload and family matters?			/
	Remark (if any): A suggestion on prompts in case, they want more clarification on what is expected from the question			
	How do you manage the challenges you face as a working mother?		/	
	Remark (if any): Please see my comments in the Word doc about this question and the next question			
	How did you balance your roles between work and family?		/	
	Remark (if any): As above			

RQ	Question	1	2	3
3	How did the coping strategies employed contribute to working mothers' psychological well-being?			
	Remark (if any):			
	In your opinion, what contributes to your own psychological well-being?			/
	Remark (if any):			
	On a scale from 1 -10, how would you describe your current well-being condition?			/
	Remark (if any): A suggestion to ask them to explain why they rate it as such - so that they can express how they feel currently			
	Has the way you managed the challenge (in Q11), sufficient to help you cope with your roles?		/	
	Remark (if any): See comment on question clarity and suggestion for additional prompt for more information			
	On a scale from 1 (very poorly) – 10 (very well), how would you rate your psychological well-being after you applied the ways (coping strategies) that you mentioned above?		/	
	Remark (if any): See suggestion on comparative question in Word document			

I hereby confirm that I have reviewed the interview questions as indicated above.



(Signature of Expert)

Name: Chie Qiu Ting

Date: 31/07/2022

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions (Before Modification)

Interview questions

Information sheet containing basic information of demographic profile such as participants' age, relationship status, current occupation etc. will be sent for them to fill up before the interview starts. Whereas questions to obtain participants' background information are as follow:

1. How do you perceive your role as a working mother?
2. What kind of expectations from your superior at your workplace?
Comment from expert: "Work expectations are placed by your superior from your workplace? You may prompt them to give specific examples."
3. What kind of expectations your family expect from you? *Comment from expert: "Familial expectations are placed by your family on you? You may prompt them to give specific examples."*

RQ 1:

What are the challenges working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family?

1. What are the challenges you face in handling work and home responsibilities (your family and household matters)? **Comment from expert: “What kind of challenges do you face in...”**

Before marriage

2. How was your personal life before marriage?
3. How was your work life before marriage?

After marriage, before having children **Comment from expert: “I assume that you will notify them about the different phases of reflection before asking them question 4 and 5.”**

4. How is your family life before having children?
5. How is your work life before having children?

After marriage and having children

6. How is your family life after having children?
7. How is your work life after having children?

RQ 2:

What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges at both work and family domains?

8. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed by your workload and family matters? **Comment from expert: “Prompts: What do you do to calm down when you feel that everything is just too much to bear?”**

9. How do you manage the challenges you face as a working mother?

10. How did you balance your roles between work and family? **Comment from expert: “How is question 9 different from question 10? In case you are asked by the respondents, how would you explain the difference? (this might be included as part of the prompts) Bear in mind that for some individuals, the challenge may be about balancing/juggling their roles.”**

RQ 3: How did the coping strategies employed contribute to working mothers' psychological well-being?

11. In your opinion, what contributes to your own psychological well-being?
12. On a scale from 1 -10, how would you describe your current well-being condition? **Comment from expert: "You may want to ask why they would provide that particular rating?"**
13. Has the way you managed the challenge (in Q11), sufficient to help you cope with your roles? **Comment from expert: "Reflecting back on the coping methods you used when you felt overwhelmed about your work and family roles, was it sufficient? Prompt: Was there anything else which you could have tried to manage better."**
14. On a scale from 1 (very poorly) – 10 (very well), how would you rate your psychological well-being after you applied the ways (coping strategies) that you mentioned above? **Comment from expert: "You might actually want to do comparisons: Firstly, how would they rate their psychological well-being when they feel overwhelmed? Then after using the ways/coping strategies, how would they rate their psychological well-being?"**

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions (Revised After Modification)

Interview questions Information sheet containing basic information of participants' demographic profile (stated below) will be sent for them to fill up before the interview starts.

1. Can you tell us your age?
2. What is your relationship status?
3. Do you have child/children?
4. How many child/children do you have?
5. How old is he/she/how old are they?
6. Do you stay in the same house with your husband and child/children?
7. What is your current occupation?
8. Where do you work?
9. On average, how many hours do you work in a week?
10. For how many years have you been incorporating work and family roles?

RQ 1: What are the challenges working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family?

1. How do you perceive your role as a working mother?
2. What kind of challenges do you face in balancing roles between work and family?

Probing question: Can you elaborate more on the challenges that you mentioned?

RQ 2: What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges at both work and family domains?

3. How do you manage the challenges that you mentioned?
4. Are there any coping strategies that you used?

Probing question: Can you give some examples?

RQ 3: How did the coping strategies employed contribute to working mothers' psychological well-being?

5. How do you perceive your work-life balance?
6. Reflecting back on the coping strategies that you mentioned in overcoming the challenges you faced, do you think it is sufficient?

APPENDIX E

Content Validation for Expert Review dated 7 Oct 2022



FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
MASTER OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY (MIOP)
MAPC 11100 Dissertation

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman	
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Name of Candidate	LIM LEE CHUN
ID Number	21AAM02126
Thesis/ Dissertation on Title	An exploratory study on challenges, coping strategies and psychological wellbeing among working mothers in Malaysia

(A) The expert will tick (/) in the column where:

3	Question is clear and essential
2	Question is not clear and needs revision
1	Question is not essential

(B) The expert will provide comment/ remark if necessary.

Information sheet containing basic information of participants' demographic profile (stated below) will be sent for them to fill up before the interview starts.

1. Can you tell us your age?
2. What is your relationship status?
3. Do you have child/children?
4. How many child/children do you have?
5. How old is he/she/how old are they?
6. Do you stay in the same house with your husband and child/children?
7. What is your current occupation?
8. Where do you work?
9. On average, how many hours do you work in a week?
10. For how many years have you been incorporating work and family roles?

No	Question	1	2	3
RQ 1	What are the challenges working mothers encounter when balancing roles between work and family?			
1.	How do you perceive your role as a working mother?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
2.	What kind of challenges do you face in balancing roles between work and family?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
	Probing question: Can you elaborate more on the challenges that you mentioned?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
RQ 2	What are the coping strategies adopted by the working mothers to overcome their challenges at both work and family domains?			
3.	How do you manage the challenges that you mentioned?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
4.	Are there any coping strategies that you used?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
	Probing question: Can you give some examples?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
RQ 3	How did the coping strategies employed contribute to working mothers' psychological well-being?			
5.	How do you perceive your work-life balance?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			
6.	Reflecting back on the coping strategies that you mentioned in overcoming the challenges you faced, do you think it is sufficient?			/
	Remark / Comment (if any):			

I hereby confirm that I have reviewed the interview questions as indicated above.



(Signature of Expert)

Name: Chie Qiu Ting

Date: 07/10/2022

APPENDIX F

Turnitin Originality Report

An exploratory study on the Challenges, Coping Strategies & Psychological Well-Being among working mothers in Malaysia.

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