



A Day in the Life of a Working Mother

By Layali H. Abdeen



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00am: Haitham, my 8-year-old son, sneaks into our room to plant a gentle good-morning kiss on my cheek. He is the earliest riser at our home, and with his kiss comes the time to wake up and start our busy day. Heading to our children's room, I am faced with the task of waking Youssef, our 3-year-old son, who is, I must admit, the hardest to wake up, but with some tickling and the removal of his favourite sheets, he leaves his bed and walks through the house crying. I run between my room and their room, between brushing their teeth and getting them dressed, in addition to getting myself dressed. Anything that does not need ironing would suffice, but it has to be black pants as I have meetings today, I murmur to myself. It's 7:10am and we are already late. We need to leave the house by 7:20am to arrive to school at 8:00am. My husband Rateb is responsible for our sons' daily nutrients and vitamin intake (and mine too). He prepares lunch boxes that we grab and rush to the car.

"Mommy, I don't want to eat this sandwich for lunch! Mommy, I hate school," they both yell. "Mama, look at Youssef, he is spilling his yoghurt on his school uniform!" Eggghhhh!! Mommy is just trying to concentrate and get us all to school safely without crashing into the multitude of crazy cars in the early morning while trying to convince them to eat their labaneh sandwiches, while simultaneously handing Youssef a tissue to wipe up the mess he's made, and trying to negotiate with an 8-year-old regarding his after-school activities.



This article brings together the ebbs and flows of a working mother's life: joy, exhaustion, stress, frustration, and finally, the underlying factor that drives all parents—love.

We barely get Haitham to school on time. He gets out of the car, flooded with advice from me about being smart and listening to his teacher and *I love you*. Next, I drop off a crying Youssef at his nursery. (He wants to go to Haitham's school with the big boys, not the little kids' school!) Afterwards, I go directly to work (my office is just across the street from Youssef's nursery), and when I reach the sixth floor where my office is located, I open my office door and finally have a moment of silence and serenity.

I get my coffee and start sorting my emails. I start by answering the urgent ones and it's already 9:30am, so I rush downstairs to leave for Ramallah because I have two client meetings there, and I have to make sure to get back before 1:30pm in time to pick up the kids from their schools. While heading to my first meeting my phone rings. When I realize it's Youssef's nursery calling, I feel a rush of emotions, and all kinds of ideas pop into my head: *Why are they calling? Something bad has happened! Is he sick? Does he have a fever? Did he*

hurt himself? I answer the phone and the nursery supervisor's voice comes through calmly, "Good morning, Um Haitham, it seems you forgot to bring Youssef's carnival costume today, and he will be the only child not dressed for the party!" Yes, of course, I forgot about that, and having just minutes before my meeting starts, I have to act quickly. I call Rateb, but he is at work and will not be able to pass by the nursery. I can't call my mother because she works mornings, so I call my mother-in-law. She says, "No worries, I will buy him one now and send it to the nursery." I breathe; at least one problem is resolved.

I finish my work in Ramallah and head back to Jerusalem. I get lucky today—no delays—and eventually



Haitham and Youssef Rabi.

get back to my office at 1:30pm, hop in my car and get the kids from their schools, we chat a bit about what they have done, before dropping them off at their grandmother's house (today is my mother's turn, other days they are with my mother-in-law). I rush back to the office and it's already 2:20pm. I need to finalize a project report before submitting it to management, and while editing it, the phone rings. Rateb is offering to pick up the kids from their grandparents' house because he finished his work. It's already 4:30pm, so I agree, since I know I won't be able to leave the office before 6:00pm. I finish the report, and as I'm driving back home, the phone rings. It's my friend, but I can't answer it and tell myself I'll call her back when I get home. I arrive home exhausted and hungry. I enter the house and it's in a state of chaos: Haitham is on his bike, and Youssef is playing with his farming tools in the garden. (Youssef wants to be a farmer.) I know there is not enough time for me to eat one bite of food, let alone sort the house mess. "I'll do it (home chores) over the weekend," I think to myself.

I head straight to Haitham's school bag to make sure he has done his homework,

only to find that he has an English dictation tomorrow and Arabic homework. I call him to stop playing and come back to the house. This process of coming inside the house requires 15-20 minutes of negotiation. I find out that he has practiced his English dictation with his grandmother, but he did not complete his Arabic homework, so I ask him to wash his face and hands and come back to complete his homework, and by then, it's already 7:15pm. During this struggle, I also try to give Youssef a bath and put him in his pyjamas while Rateb is preparing a light snack for us. After finishing his homework, Haitham jumps in the shower. I love this time of the day (my kids' shower time) because it's the only quite time I have with my kids to chat about their days, their friends, and their dreams and fears. It's 8:00pm, they have had their snack, brushed their teeth and gotten into bed.

Now, I think to myself, is when I can check emails and have some downtime. But Youssef wants a bedtime story, so we choose a book (a very short one) and start reading the story, but then he wants another story, and Mommy is so tired but gets another story to read to Youssef. I lean in to give Haitham and Youssef goodnight kisses and they both give me a hug and tell me: "Mommy, we love you a lot... *bahubek kteer*, Mama." And with that, despite all my exhaustion, I am on top of the world.

At 9:00pm my work phone rings, and it's one of the team members requesting last minute edits on the submitted report. (Most of my colleagues I work with are located in Washington, DC so the time difference is typically seven hours.) I open my laptop and do the edits and send back the report. Finally, it's my time. I am exhausted,

can't feel my back, sleepy, but also feeling accomplished and happy. Rateb prepares me his signature cup of mint tea, as I sit on the couch in front of the TV screen and I consider watching a comedy show. But after drinking half my tea, I find myself unable to keep my eyes open while thinking to myself: *I forgot to call my friend back. And again I did not prepare and iron my clothes. Oh, Bukleh!* (That's our cute pet dog who is looking at me with demanding eyes.) And before I know it, I am fast asleep until the next day!

That, in a nutshell, is an average day in my life, one that I dare say is without added complications. No major events are taking place, I am not traveling (my work requires frequent travel outside Palestine), no sick child, my mother was available to take in the kids, my mother-in-law stepped in to avoid a crisis, and Rateb was available to give a supporting hand. Without such a support system I would have never been able to pursue a career, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rateb, my mother, my mother-in-law, for their continuous and unconditional support and love.

Some parents would say they feel guilty, because of the compromises they have to make, and being unable to spend more time with their kids, but to be honest, I rarely have this feeling of guilt (except when I am travelling for long periods). I am pursuing the successful career that I have always aspired for, and I know that my kids are getting the attention, love, and care they need from both their mother and father. I do understand, however, why so many mothers choose to stay at home or choose part-time jobs, as they don't want to make compromises, especially mothers who don't have access to a support system necessary from family or from work.

The working environment, I believe, is also a crucial factor to some of the mothers returning to the labour force. On that front, I have been also lucky,

because I work at an international organization that believes in healthy work-life balance, and offers flexible working hours, including options to work from home. It is worth noting that the Palestinian private sector still lacks such systems, making it more difficult for mothers to have a leading role in the private sector, and hence we rarely have young mothers who are CEOs or at top management levels.

I am grateful for everything in my life—even the exhaustion—but I would like to believe that one day women will not have to choose between a family and a job. We are all multifaceted humans who deserve a full life, and a chance to make our dreams come true, no matter how big or small.

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Our Readers Say ...

"I remember coming to Rukab's with my parents when I was young. I hated how sour the strawberry flavor was, but I would always order it anyway because it was pink! It's my favourite as an adult, which I think is because I forced myself to like it as a child!"

Nour (Ramallah)

"On the night of the 48,000 March for Gaza last year, I painted a memorial of the event and the monumental scope of our demonstration. It's somewhere in Ramallah, but fairly hidden. Try to find it!"

Anonymous (Ramallah)