Work-Life Balance among Working Women –
A Cross-cultural Review

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG WORKING WOMEN —
A CROSS-CULTURAL REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which working women balance their work and family life. There has been a growing concern over work-family issues and the notion of balancing these two domains due to an increasing number of women entering the world of paid employment. Such a discussion rarely comes into the picture in the case of men. A clear-cut demarcation between work and home is made with men being less involved in chores at home. The concept of work-family balance has been used to explain the equilibrium between responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside paid work. Having a balance in the work and family domains implies that this equilibrium is in the required proportion for the concerned individual. Several studies have been conducted on work-family issues in Western countries, but findings from these studies cannot be projected to other countries since work and family roles are perceived differently in different countries. Work-family experience is not universal, but rather culture-specific which is evident in the literature. Thus, there is a need to analyse how working women balance work-family issues across different countries.

Keywords: Work-family balance, conflict, facilitation, child-care, culture.

Introduction

Concern over work and family issues has increased on account of the changes in which work has been defined and modified by the processes of modernisation and industrialization, as well as the entry of women into the world of paid work. As a result, research on work-family balance has become a well-defined area of research in its own right. Work and family balance relates to the amount of time devoted to one's life at work, relative to the time spent outside work. The goal is not to achieve equal amounts of time at home and at work, but the amount that is appropriate for a particular individual or family. Getting a perfect balance is rarely achievable, but when these two spheres are not in harmony with each other, individual and family well-being suffers. While work-family balance is an increasingly popular term, there is no clear consensus on what it means, although most definitions have included the concept of juggling, sustainability and flexibility. The concept of work-family balance has been used to explain the equilibrium between responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside work. Having a balance in the work and family domains implies that this equilibrium is in the required proportion for the concerned individual. Balancing work and family differs among people. Some prefer spending more time in paid work and less time at home, while others ensure that their job does not interfere with their family life. In sum, work and family balance may be defined as having sufficient control and autonomy over the work and family domains. Clark (2001) & Voydanoff (2005) argued that work and family are the two most important domains in people's lives and as a result, work and family can cause conflict if they compete with each other. Work and family, however, are synergistic and can complement each other. In fact, the positive side of the work and family can enhance the well-being of the family unit.

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Greenhaus & Powell (2006) stated that the experiences in one role may improve people's well-being in other roles and their quality of life. Today, scholars and organizations recognise the benefit of integrating work and family because work and family are both an integral part of people's everyday lives. Some scholars have argued that effectively balancing work and family is an important concern in present day society (Milkie & Peltola, 1999).

Work-family issues differ across various countries as they are influenced by factors at the micro and macro level which vary across countries. The macro level variations include differences in the social, economic, legislative and technological systems. These factors provide certain implications for employees who attempt to juggle their work and family domains (Joplin et al, 2003; Poelman, 2003; Sheridan & Conway, 2001). Different working options and family-friendly work policies are features prominent in developed countries rather than in developing countries (Lewis & Ayudhya, 2006). Similarly, working from home is a norm in Western countries with the help of technological advancement. However, this may not be applicable to other countries (Joplin et al, 2003). In developing countries where even everyday survival is difficult, working for longer hours becomes essential. Thus, in such a situation, people are bound to undergo any kind of conflict or imbalance. Every society possesses certain social elements that can influence the manner in which people experience work-family balance. For instance, the family organisation in Western countries tends to be nuclear and distant but in Asian countries the joint or extended families were common where people lived in close proximity (Spector et al, 2004). Thus, demands in the family domain as well as support availability varies in different family structures (Joplin et al, 2003). In terms of community resources and infrastructure, there is variation across countries which aids in managing work and family life effectively. For instance, the government in some countries takes the initiative to provide child-care and elder-care assistance to their employees, but this may not be found in other countries (Shafiro & Hammer, 2004). Apart from these macro level variations, differences at the micro level also exist across regions (Poelmans, 2003). The micro-level differences refer to the variations in the individual variables, which include role demands assumed by individuals. In both Western and non-Western countries, that leads to work-family conflict tends to be similar, but people's responses to these pressures differ, and tend to be governed by their culture (Lewis & Ayudhya, 2006). Variations in work and family life are observed across different countries due to these macro and micro differences.

Origin of Work-family Research

Work-family balance metaphor is a social construct located within a particular period of time and originating in the Western world as a response to dilemmas regarding the management of work and family life. Research in this domain emerged at a time when the number of women entering the labor market grew and resulted in a focus on working mothers and dual-earner families. It is also known as work-family interaction, work-family fit, work-life balance and work-family integration. Initial research on the family in Western countries emerged during World War II, when women were encouraged to join the paid workforce in U.S. and U.K. However, in order to provide jobs to troops returning from the War, women were asked to resume their family roles. Scholars began to show interest in the intersection of work and family roles because of the flux in gender roles resulting from these social dynamics

(MacDermid, 2004). The early period after World War II was considered as an idealisation of the American family with the husband as the main breadwinner and the wife as housewife and mother, by the timeline study of work-family research conducted in the U.S. In order to secure the rights of working women in the lower middle class and of business and professional women in the upper class, a movement was started during that period. On the other hand, a strong feminist movement emerged during the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in a critical evaluation of the traditional gender roles in the economy. The number of dual earner couples began to rise as a result of the oil crisis, which in turn raised the cost of living during that period. However, during the 1980s, it became clear that women were taking on the burden of dual roles instead of being liberated from traditional gender roles, which led to some disillusionment with the increasing role of women in the workforce. In addition, family-friendly policies were also introduced in the workplace during that period. During the 1990s, the focus was on the expansion of work-family research to previously less studied populations in the U.S such as ethnic groups, single-parent families, and poor working families, as well as on the organization's role to reduce the pressures of work and family faced by the employees (Pruitt & Rapoport, 2002). As opposed to advocating government responses in the form of public policy on matters pertaining to childcare, the U.S. government adopted a different approach to manage work-life issues of their employees by motivating organizations to look after the needs of their employees by making them important stakeholders in the process. Thus, in comparison to other developed countries such as Australia and Canada, which focused on more governmental interventions to manage work-family pressures, the U.S followed the policy of short unpaid family leave (Kelly et al, 2008).

Research on work-life issues received a boost in the United Kingdom with the onset of World War II. The option of a part-time job was introduced by the U.K. government since a majority of women working in the paid workforce was finding it difficult to balance their work and family responsibilities in the absence of their spouses who were engaged in fighting battles in the war front. However, this measure undertaken by the U.K. government did not bring dramatic changes in the traditional gendering of dual roles, but it was helpful in reducing conflict to a slight degree (Crompton et al, 2010).

In India, research on work and family issues started during the mid 1970s when research on working women increased, in which the exploration of the socio-economic impact of women's work on the family, power relationships within the family, and family marital quality and children were also included. However, work and family research in India have undertaken two separate and disconnected paths. One is the path chosen by women's studies centres through which they looked at the structures of patriarchy within the country, and how these contributed to the subordination of women at work and at home. They were mainly focused on the underprivileged and rural women. The other path was psychosocial research which examined the work and family relations within urban settings from a role theory perspective. There has been little cross-pollination between these two streams, marked by a lack of cross-preferences in published studies. Most studies conducted on Indian women were preoccupied with the concerns of status and perceptions towards working women including working women's views about about non-working women and vice-versa, societal views about working women, and working women's views about husband's home role participation. They also covered the broad theme of stresses and strains of balancing work and home roles and their impact on the psychological well-being of

women. Other studies examined the changing roles, values and expectations in urban middle class families. Research on work and family during this decade indicated that working status was not a guarantee to equitable relationships within the family. Research on Indian society differentiated between career women and working women, and also hinted at the possibility of men's roles being in transition in the midst of largely traditional division of work and family roles in society. Even though Indian organizations provided family friendly measures, they eventually proved to be an imitation of western practices rather than a genuine concern for the better handling of work and family responsibilities (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004).

Defining Work-family Balance

There is still debate about the definition of work-family balance but it implies that there is a balance between the demands of work and family (Guest, 2001). Work-family balance has been a catch phrase over the past decade as a result of the increased demands from work and family (Frone, 1992). Some researchers (Joplin et al, 2003) prefer to use an overarching concept of equilibrium, balance and harmony while other researchers use the concept of fit and incorporate the demands of the role and environment and the availability of personal resources. In addition, some researchers (Clark 2001) have defined work-family balance as an absence of work-family conflict or increasing levels of work-family enrichment. Others defined work-family balance as an effective juggling act between paid work and various activities that are important to people. Researchers (Kalliath & Brough 2008; Clark 2001) have also focused on the compatibility of both roles and their promotion of growth, satisfaction between multiple roles, perceived control between multiple roles, and relationship between conflict and facilitation.

Work-family balance is an art of managing both the work and family domain effectively. Work-family balance suggests that work should not hinder other things which are important in people's lives, such as quality time with their family, leisure time or recreational activities, personal development, etc. Balancing these two roles equally will not result in work-life balance, nor will the setting aside of an equal number of hours for each role lead to work-family balance. The balance which seems appropriate today may seem inappropriate tomorrow. The ideal balance in a person's life may vary across the different phases of one's life, i.e. before marriage, after marriage, with children, when starting a career or after retirement. In sum, there is no one-size fits all or picture-perfect work-family balance. Moreover, in recent decades, the work pressure has been intensifying for both men and women. Different factors associated with work have resulted in excessive stress and strain among workers. As a result, there is a work domination of family life created by work demands, which in turn results in work-family imbalance. In order to be successful in both the roles, women try to organise and balance their work and family domains, for which a great deal of adjustment and accommodation is required. For the last two decades, work-family issues have become a growing concern among researchers due to significant changes in the work force, such as the entry of an increasing number of women into the labor market as well as the existence of dual-earner, and single-parent families (Aryee et al, 2005; Hansen, 1991; Barnett, 1998; Edward & Rothbard, 2000).

Scholars from various disciplines such as psychology, occupational health, sociology and organisational behaviour have conducted research on work-family interface (Barnett, 1998). Scholars from psychology generally discussed individual-level behaviour and outcomes such as mental health report, marital quality and work-family conflicts. Occupational health researchers highlighted work-related physical stress and health outcomes for workers and their families. A broader view was adopted by sociologists in which they considered the effects of workplace conditions on families as well as individuals, while organisational scholars mentioned outcomes such as productivity, absenteeism and turnover (Frone, 2003). There have been several studies conducted on work-family issues, but most of these studies have been conducted in Western countries, particularly in the United States. This is because Western countries experienced diversification in the workforce earlier as compared to other countries (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 2005; Peolmans et al, 2003). However, the findings from the studies conducted in Western countries cannot be generalised to other countries because both work and family operate within a wider context in social, economic and political areas, including cultural norms and values that differ across different countries (Westman, 2005; Lewis & Ayudhya, 2006). Nevertheless, it is assumed that work roles and family roles are perceived differently by people from different countries. Moreover, work-family experience is likely to be partially culture-specific rather than being a universal experience, which is also evident in the literature.

Work Related Issues

In order to achieve top positions in executive jobs, women across the globe have to face obstacles and barriers. According to the International Labor Organization's Report, 2001 titled "Breaking Through The Glass Ceiling: Women in Management", women in the United States had made more progress as compared to women in other countries, despite the fact that they held only a small percentage of executive positions. The changing roles of women in business and government in more than 70 countries, steps to improve opportunities for women by highlighting the obstacles faced by them in their career development, and promoting gender equality, were some of the issues that were examined in the report. The report concluded that women in these countries were experiencing glass walls in addition to glass ceiling where women were denied training and mid-level positions which could have helped them to reach top-level jobs. The predominance of male values and gender roles was considered as another factor that prevented women from reaching top jobs. The main hindrance faced by women, in recruitment and promotion to management positions, was the dominance of male values followed by family obligations according to the report of a survey conducted on bank managers in the European Union during the year 1999.

A study on lawyers revealed that various work-related factors contributed to time-based and strain-based work to non-work conflict among married female and male lawyers. Work involvement, work-role stressors and work context were considered as three major factors in this study, out of which the single factor responsible for work—non work conflict for both male and female lawyers was work overload. Factors which contributed to work—non work conflict varied between male and female lawyers. Moreover, female lawyers preferred working in firms that had a larger number of female lawyers. Since the strain-based conflict of female lawyers was increased by additional family roles,

variables of domestic status like working status of the partners, having pre-school children did not have much effect on females' work-non work conflict (Wallace, 1999). In a study conducted among women who were employed as Professional Counsellors, women counsellors were observed to be at a higher risk of developing compassion, fatigue, burnout and secondary traumatic stress due to their emotionally demanding nature of work as a result of which this study tried to examine whether a relationship between factors such as multiple role balance, number of dependents, age, experience, professional quality of life and wellness among women counselors existed or not. The study revealed that women with higher scores on multiple role balance were capable of balancing multiple roles in their lives, whereas women with moderate scores were interpreted in several ways. It was assumed that these women simply accepted their roles without having a positive feeling towards those roles. Another assumption was that these women might feel that it is their sole responsibility towards the role. The findings also revealed that there was a significant relationship of professional quality of life and demographic factors with overall wellbeing. Moreover, there was an emphasis on giving importance to both professional and personal lives when overall holistic wellbeing are analysed and evaluated (Martin, 2012).

There are several problems that a woman encounters when she decides to undertake a job in India. The root cause of the problem is the patriarchal structure of the society, where women are expected to give the highest priority to the needs of the family irrespective of whether they work outside the house or not. Their primary role is considered to be looking after the home and children, and their employment outside the home is still regarded as secondary (Arora, 2003). Women's pregnancy and maternity leave might result in a delay in their promotions as compared to their male counterparts. They also face sexual harassment and exploitation in their workplace (Shukla, 2003). When working women try to manage both home and job along with the demands of childcare, they are bound to experience role conflict. One of the greatest drawbacks which resulted from being focused on their career is the high chances of disharmony in their family life, where the modern educated husbands too expect their wives to serve them and the household despite the women working outside the homes. Studies also revealed that the discrimination which a woman faced at the workplace was related to the lower job commitment which was acquired through the socialisation process. When women consider work as an additional role and do not set career goals, they are likely to face problems at work. A low representation of women in higher posts has been considered as a reflection of discrimination in recruitment policies or prejudices as well as the lack of orientation and commitment of women towards their careers. In addition, there are also studies that focused on the changes taking place in women's lives as a result of their employment. Women were able to create a bigger space for themselves by emerging out of the traditional role (Abraham, 2002; Mahajan, 1996).

For Malaysian women, the task of managing work and family roles became even more difficult due to the limited work arrangement available to them. The majority of women employees worked longer hours along with their male counterparts, since the number of working hours is fixed from nine to five by the labor laws under the Malaysian Federal Government. Other employment modes which were non-conventional in nature is either very new or not applicable in Malaysia. For instance, flexible working hours had been considered only recently by the Government with a view to motivate women to

join the work force, which in turn will help them in balancing work and family life (Aziz, 2011). Earlier, the different types of family friendly policies provided to the employees were various leave entitlements like unpaid leave, emergency leave, maternity/paternity leave and annual leave. However, there is still the absence of work arrangements such as part-time employment, job sharing or tele-working (Subramanian & Selvaratnam, 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that for Malaysian employed women, combining work and family roles is challenging due to the limited work arrangements and prevalence of traditional gender roles in the society. Employed mothers in Malaysia were likely to experience conflict and work overload in the process of managing work and family domains (Noor, 1999).

In China, women constituted 38% of the full-time workforce. The rate of participation in paid work was high throughout their working lives, following the arrival of the communist state six decades ago (Cooke, 2007). Since part-time work was not an option, the majority of women in China were full-time workers. The concept of job sharing, flexitime and term-time working did not exist in Chinese society. Working mothers drew support from commercial domestic services, family networks and nurseries for the purpose of household chores and childcare. Earlier studies on Chinese women's working pattern revealed that in order to accommodate their family commitments, Chinese women preferred work which was less demanding, or they opted for informal employment (Yi & Chien, 2002). Many working couples depended on their parents for child-care support as a result of the one-child policy and early retirement age i.e. 55 years for men and 50 years for women.

In Japan, the amount of time spent at work is highest in comparison with other developed countries. The working hours for Japanese male employees is 46.6 hours per week, and for female employees it is 40.4 hours per week on an average. Thus, it can be seen that their personal time is limited as a result of more working hours, which in turn may lead to the feeling of imbalance and unhappiness. Further, working for long hours resulted in less time for family life. Japanese women were compelled to quit their jobs after childbirth, and if they decided to return to work later on, they worked only on a part-time basis. In addition, women employees also felt uncomfortable to take maternity leave as they considered their maternity leave to be a burden on the company. They were also not sure whether they can balance childcare and their job after they returned from their maternity leave. They also feared that they may fall behind in technical knowledge when they joined the work after availing maternity leave.

Due to poor social security provisions for unemployment in China, and absence of family based state welfare benefits, both men and women were forced to undertake continuous full-time employment. In Bangladesh, however, the majority of women actively participated in the workforce despite the traditional structure of family roles being prominent, wherein men are considered as the sole breadwinners. The two important reasons for women opting for paid work are, a change in their mindset, and the rising cost of living. Thus, dual-career families have replaced the traditional family system by bringing about various socio-demographic changes in Bangladesh. The study on female teachers, of Bangladesh revealed that work interfered in the family life of female teachers as well as the reverse of family life interfering with their work life. As a result, they found it difficult to balance both the domains. The study suggested that ensuring better facilities for the female employees in terms of

flexible working hours, transport facility, child-care centres, reduced work load etc., would help them in achieving work and family balance in their lives (Uddin et al, 2013).

There have been several studies conducted on IT professionals in India in recent years. One such study showed that there is a direct proportional relationship between work-life balance and working hours. The findings revealed that women who worked longer hours were bound to experience more conflict as compared to those female employees who worked for a relatively lesser number of hours. Thus, it was seen that there was a wide gap in the work-life conflict between females who worked for eight hours, and women who worked for ten hours per day (Aishwarya & Ramasundaram, 2011).

A study conducted from a Narrative Life Story Framework found that women who had a strong belief in faith connected the element of work with their faith. They believed that their purpose of life is work which is created by God. Hence, they considered their work as being significantly meaningful. For them, values are an inseparable part of coping strategies and the personal and professional lives are highly valued by them. The study also revealed that the hardships and experiences faced by women were affected by their cultural identity and cultural background. Moreover, these women were also able to understand their work and personal life in a much better way through the help of faith. Women also admitted that there was a positive effect of having multiple roles in both work and family life. One of the most important factors for achieving a healthy work-life balance was flexibility, which is also indicated by several studies in work-life balance. In order to achieve flexibility, women have a longing for their own business as they thought that in order to achieve a better work-life balance, a flexible schedule at work was necessary. A sense of being self-dependent in all areas of work was another factor which gave them a feeling of elation. It was concluded that the most important factor in achieving work life balance or choosing a career field was faith, which in turn also played a very important role in relationships for women. Faith was also a factor which helped them in deciding where they would prefer spending their time, and moreover the adaptive style (i.e. how they coped with change) was also affected by faith (Krymis, 2011).

Family Related Issues

Even when they were equally well-educated as their husbands, Chinese women gave more priority to family responsibilities over their own career, either voluntarily or involuntarily, as a result of traditional Chinese cultural influence. The traditional norm of a family was that the husband would deal with external matters such as earning a livelihood, while the wife was expected to look after the household chores even though she was working outside (Cooke, 2007). The main source of work-family conflict for Chinese employees was long working hours, and limited or no leisure time. The worst offenders of work-life balance were government organisations because they did not have any formal work-life balance policy. Moreover, government employees were expected to come to office during non-working hours to attend to urgent meetings or for other tasks assigned by their superiors. Another important reason for work-family conflict was the heavy workload, where employees had no choice but to work overtime in order to complete their tasks. There was pressure on them to perform at a high level due to competition in the market. In addition, frequent trips for business purposes also led to disruptions in

family life. However, individuals adopted different strategies to cope with the pressures of work and family. In order to remain fit and healthy and socialise with like-minded people, individuals took the initiative and joined sports clubs. Some married women chose to focus on their career by postponing or delaying motherhood. The most commonly used coping mechanism by mothers to alleviate the work-family conflict was by relying on their family members for support, and outsourcing their housework. In addition, a small percentage of male employees requested their spouses to quit their jobs and become full-time housewives. For others, the only option to avoid work-family conflict was to withdraw from family and social life (Xian & Cooke, 2012).

In Bangladesh, the identity of an individual is linked to the identity of the extended family. Women in Bangladesh are still solely responsible for performing household chores, childcare, and other family activities. In Japan the two life domains that played an important role are balancing work and family, and balancing work and leisure. The spouses of these women employees were also unable to devote time to family and childcare as a result of work overload or job transfers. Thus, spending time with their husbands, family members and educating their children were limited. Another important aspect in balancing work and family is the care for the elderly, which is considered as women's primary responsibility, but nowadays full-time working women are facing difficulties in fulfilling the role of primary caregivers to the elderly due to the aging population. Thus, it can be concluded that in Japan, in terms of balancing work and family, there is a lack of time and flexibility (Bienek, 2014). A study in India, on female medical practitioners revealed that the important stressors that affected their entire family were work overload and reduced interest in family activities. In addition, the lack of support, time pressure, the amount of official work and on-duty calls, were identified as other stressors. The family lives of these women were affected by different factors such as bringing official work to their homes, getting telephone calls from work during family events, and spending time at official meetings away from home. Role conflict was another important stressor for female practitioners as identified by the study (Rout, 1995).

Studies have also highlighted social conditioning right from childhood days as being responsible for the secondary status of women in Indian society, as a result of which it becomes difficult for them to break the norms of traditional roles despite being educated or earning substantially. Secondly, the prevalence of male attitudes known as male chauvinism is also responsible for the secondary status being accorded to women. In addition, patrifocal family which gave importance to men's interests was also regarded as deeply affecting women's access to achievements in education and employment (Hiremath, 2005; Mukhopadhyay & Semour, 1999). Studies have examined the modifications in marriage systems, inheritance and succession practices due to changes in the structure and functions of the family in India. Gender discrimination and occupational segregation are still prevalent in Indian society. Women's achievements are comparatively lower and they are seen in the lower ranks of the job hierarchy despite making recognisable advances in education and career. In addition, women are often paid less for the same jobs. These factors indicate the prevalence of gender differentiated family roles which eventually perpetuates sexual division of labor (Thomas, 2007)

Another study conducted in India collected the views of women in dual-earner families on work-life balance variables and the type of support that they required from their employers. The study

revealed that policies formulated by organisations that promoted flexible work arrangements had positive relationships with work-life balance as perceived by working women. Women employees considered time flexibility as one of the important factors that helps in balancing their work and family life. Their perception was affected by factors such as the ability to interrupt office work in order to attend to family matters and then return to work, provisions to partially work from home, the ability to make a convenient work schedule arrangement, to avail leave when required, child-care provisions along with elder-care facilities etc. The majority of respondents said that they expected their organisations to support them and allow them to attend courses or training programmes which would enable them to upgrade their knowledge and skills. The study also revealed that getting support from the organisation is very crucial in finding opportunities of employment as well as in achieving a desirable work-life balance. There was a perceptible indication that women give more importance to their family lives as respondents indicated that they would rather spend more time in fulfilling family responsibilities than fulfilling work demands. Respondents, however, also mentioned that they would work equally hard in order to manage their work and family life (Seshadri & Kar, 2012). A study of IT professionals revealed that the emotional intelligence of IT professionals was positively related to personal life interference with work, work-personal life enhancement and overall work-life balance. Emotionally intelligent people are considered to be better focused, well-organised, they pursue their goals consistently, and barely lose their temper. Thus, the study indicated that emotionally intelligent people have the ability to adjust to all conditions as well as increase their productivity, thereby creating a better work-life balance (Kaur & Walia, 2010). On the other hand, a study conducted in the IT sector in Chennai and Coimbatore revealed that women professionals were experiencing high organizational role stress. There was a significant difference in the inter-role distance (i.e. conflict between organisational and familial roles with special reference to dual career families), and in the case of married and unmarried females. Inter-role conflict was expected to be less when at least one family member remained at home to look after the family. Since married women responded to a bigger set of significant others (i.e. conflicting expectations and demands by different role senders) they were more likely to experience role expectation conflicts as compared to unmarried females. Married females also complained of higher stress because of role overload, implying that too much is expected from the role than they can cope with. Also, the most potent stressor that was identified was resource inadequacy, which means the absence of resources required for better role performance (Kavitha et al, 2012).

Balance Related Issues

Several factors are responsible for affecting the personal and professional lives of women in Western countries which was demonstrated by a study conducted on female medical practitioners in Australia, Britain and Denmark. The study revealed that balancing job and family, job satisfaction, autonomy, fair remuneration, availability of flexible work schedules and having an edge over the decision-making process were some of the factors that affected the lives of women. In addition to these, some of the personal issues were self-care, quality time with spouse, children, family and friends and time-management in order to pursue interests which were non-medical in nature. The conflicts arising out of these demands reduced the job satisfaction of female professionals which in turn led to imbalances and

stress in their lives. In order to achieve a balanced and successful personal and professional life, what was required was a supportive family, a flexible work environment and changes in culturally based expectations of female professionals (Kilmartin, 2002). A recent review of work-life research in Australia and New Zealand (Bardoel et al, 2008) revealed that labor demographics and the changing nature of work were two important factors responsible for research on work-life issues. Several existing themes of work-life issues in Australia and New Zealand were identified by this study, which included challenges posed by the changing nature of work especially the lengthening of work hours, maternity or paternity leave and child-care, legislation and government policy pertaining to child-care, different family structures facing work-life challenges as well as gender issues in work-family research. The study concluded that some of the characteristics surrounding research in other developed countries were adopted by work-family research, i.e. reducing negative employee outcomes by focusing on an organisation's interventions.

A study on Women in Secondary School Administration examined their different perspectives on the ways in which they balanced their multiple roles, and it also talked about the social barriers and difficulties they faced in playing multiple roles. The findings indicated that work commitments interfered with home commitments and vice-versa. Respondents revealed that they received support for a maximum work-life balance from the districts where they were employed. In addition, they received support from their supervisors as well. Respondents admitted that they have a major responsibility at home and child-care, but the presence of another adult at home makes their work lighter. Respondents also mentioned that stress was created by conflicting multiple roles in their lives. With regard to health, they believed that their health was affected by stress, which arose from multiple role demands. The women admitted that it was challenging and difficult to achieve work-life balance but they tried to achieve it by adopting different coping strategies (Byington, 2010).

The study conducted on Korean workers to investigate the effect of work-life balance in their lives revealed that there was an intersection of work and personal life due to the collectivist organisational climate in Korea. Workers did not regard work and family as independent domains. Korean employees gave more priority to their work life over personal life in order to preserve the unity and harmony of their organizations from being disrupted by their personal life. Koreans did not separate their work life from family life as they feared that their work performance would be hindered by their family duties, which in turn imposed a burden on them. The study also found that the work-life balance of Korean employees might be hampered by the social situation and lack of organizational support. An empirical study also found that the in-role performance of the employees is indirectly affected by work-life balance through affective commitment. In addition, the findings also revealed that in order to reinforce the effect of work-life balance on in-role performance, affective commitment plays the role of a mediating factor. Traditionally, being a collectivist society traditionally, Koreans have been experiencing changes in values where they are pressurised to accept individualistic values as a result of recent changes in the economy and culture. The introduction of a five-day work week in 2004 led to many changes in work, people's values and in their social environment. The individuals were able to spend more time with their families as well as in their personal development with the help of the five-

day workweek (Kim, 2014). Thus, these changes brought about an increasing desire and interest in work-life balance in Korea.

In China, a positive relation existed between work-life balance and level of job and income of employees in China. Employees holding higher posts in organizations experienced greater work pressure which affected their family life in a negative way. On the other hand, employees getting lesser incomes experienced more struggle with work-life issues as they were unable to commercialise their work and family responsibilities. In comparison to men, the majority of women were affected by work-life issues since they spent more time on housework, childcare, and elderly care than men despite the fact that women, on an average, were working for fewer hours than men. In addition, there is an impact of income level on work-life conflict in China. Work-family conflict is experienced more by women who contribute 40-60% of the income for family expenses. These women also did not have a clear role for themselves. Thus, they struggled between work and family. This is because women with lower income gave more priority to the family, while women with higher income focussed to a greater extent on their career growth (Wu et al, 2003).

With regard to work and family variables, several important trends were identified through a study conducted in Canada. The study pointed out that employees who worked in larger organizations saw a gradual increase in the working hours and over-time work which was further extended over the weekends. The heaviest work demands were experienced by male employees working in a non-profit sector. On the other hand, family demands which were heavier in nature were experienced by women employees and those with dependents. In general, employees' work demands were exceeded by the demands of their family (Duxbury & Higgins, 2001). A comparative study on people working in organizations and self-employed people was conducted to analyse the relationship between work and family responsibilities. The study revealed that there was a significant impact on gender and employment type on work/family issues. As compared to individuals employed in organizations, more autonomy, more schedule flexibility and higher levels of involvement were enjoyed by self-employed individuals. However, there were reports of greater work family conflicts and greater family role pressures due to parental demands and lower family satisfaction experienced by self-employed individuals as compared to individuals employed in organizations. The reason is that self-employed individuals are solely responsible for their business. Thus, they devote more time and commitment to work. There was less work involvement, less autonomy, less work-family conflict, less job satisfaction, less time commitment to work among women in comparison to men. However, there was a display of more schedule flexibility, time devoted to the home, family commitment and life stress by women as compared to men. This shows that women were more inclined towards family commitments and preferred spending more time with their family. However, they suffered from stress to a greater extent than men due to the multiple roles played by them (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001).

In a Non-Western context, Malaysia has been experiencing changes in the composition of a workforce that is similar to that of Western countries. However, there is a prevalence of traditional gender roles in their society. As a result, Malaysians faced a potential challenge to combine work and family roles, and especially for women employees (Noor, 1999). Women in Malaysia contributed significantly to the economic development of the country due to an increase in the number of women in

the labor force. In a traditional society, Malaysian women were expected to perform household duties along with child rearing. However, in the modern society, they have undertaken a new role with their entry into the world of paid work, while following the traditional role of housewife and mother, since gender role ideologies are still traditional in Malaysia (Westman, 2005). The majority of women did not expect equality with their spouses in doing housework as they are aware of the prevalence of different gender roles in society. Thus, they ended up juggling different roles simultaneously (Noor, 2006). The situation of balancing work and family is even more difficult for divorced or widowed women when they are the sole breadwinners in the family.

Studies in India on dual performance and dilemmas faced by working women observed that the role conflict was purely psychological in nature which arose from the push and pull factors between the demands emerging from the domestic role and the occupational role, and discarded the factors such as caste, income, education and occupation to be the causes of role-conflict. Among several problems faced by working women, the common ones were work overload, burden of domestic chores, problems of coping with both the roles at the same time as well as role conflict. On the other hand, the studies also tried to trace the predictors of work-family conflict among Indian women, where patterns of predictors were not identical even though they were similar, with spouse support being the strongest predictor. Studies have also highlighted women's ability to handle both roles simultaneously. Role conflict was experienced by women who felt that they were caught in the middle of two roles, but otherwise women generally accepted and managed both roles.

In recent years, research on work-life balance suggests that individuals are able to achieve personal and professional goals with the help of successful work-life balance. Earlier, the nature of work was viewed as a necessity for everyday survival, but in today's society, work is perceived as a source of personal satisfaction by the employees. A healthy energy for the employees is created by work-life balance in the organisation. When a person is able to devote time to both work and family life without neglecting either of them, a balanced life is said to be achieved. Congenial conditions are required to be created in the organisation in order to balance work with their family needs by the employees. Even in the family domain, such efforts are desirable. There is a significant relationship between work-life balance of female employees and variables like age, working environment, training programs, fringe benefits and family support. In comparison to the younger respondents, women above 40 years were capable of balancing work and family life much better. It was also observed that the ability to create a better work-life balance depended on a motivating work environment. Suggestions that were given by respondents in order to achieve better balance were time management, sharing workload, maintaining a positive approach and better communication with superiors and colleagues (Mitta et al, 2013).

Similarly, another study conducted on women faculty members in the College of Management in Pune revealed that the majority of women faculty members had considerable difficulty in managing their work and family lives. Their job-related stress spilt-over into their personal life as a result of which it was difficult for them to manage time for activities of self-interest or self-development. There was also a severe impact on their mental and physical health. A major barrier to work-life balance for the respondents was the time taken to travel to their workplace. Since women were primarily responsible for household responsibilities, childcare and elderly-care, spending more time on doing household

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chores or working over-time at the workplace eventually created problems by disturbing the equilibrium between work and family life. In the parameters of work-life balance, designation-wise differences were also observed wherein respondents with higher designation were required to extend their duty hours. The maximum time was used in preparing lectures by faculty members of lower designation, while maximum time was spent in teaching by higher designation faculty members. Lastly, among all designations, the lowest time was spent on work related to the students' projects (Dam & Daphtardar, 2012).

Role of Organizations in Work-life Issues

Organizations across cultures are known to implement various work-life balance practices which are beneficial in reducing work-life issues as well as in enabling employees to be more effective at work and in the performance of various roles. Organizations are increasingly pressurised to design various kinds of practices which will facilitate the efforts of employees to fulfil their personal and professional commitments. Several work-life balance initiatives have been taken up by organizations to assist employees to balance their work and family responsibilities efficiently, further their well-being and provide organizational benefits. There are a variety of family-friendly policies such as flexible working hours, part-time work, job-sharing, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, parental leave, and on-site child-care facility (Lazar et al, 2010). In addition, organisations may also provide a range of benefits with regard to health and well-being of employees such as extended health insurance for the employees and dependents, personal days, access to programs and services in order to encourage fitness as well as mental and physical health. However, organizations are likely to have their own motives behind implementing various work-life practices. First, in order to increase work life balance practices of female employees and make use of their capacities; secondly, to keep employees motivated and performing well; thirdly, to make the organisation more attractive to employees, and lastly, to have a better corporate social responsibility (Lazar et al, 2010). Factors which affect employees' attitudes and perceptions through the introduction of work-life balance practices include job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention and job stress. However, job performance, absenteeism costs, customer satisfaction and organisational productivity are in turn affected by these factors (Lazar et al, 2010). One of the barriers in achieving work-life balance is that employees often remain unaware of their work-life entitlements following the implementation of work-life balance practices, which was highlighted through a research conducted among organisations in the U.K (Kodz et al, 1998)

Conclusion

Work-family structure can be influenced by the context in which the work and the family domains operate in a particular environment. The work timings, descriptions of work as well, as work schedules could vary among women across countries. Thus, it is understandable that demands arising from work and family roles differ in various settings. What is considered as a demanding factor in one setting might not be seen as an issue of concern, or demanding, in another setting. Work and family roles are viewed differently by people belonging to different cultural backgrounds. There were variations in terms of reasons for working, spouses' preferences towards their employment, and the extent to which their

work role is perceived, although women of different countries do not differ greatly in their perceptions relating to work and family roles. Women in different professions are caught in a dilemma with expectations and ideologies of traditional societies at home, and demands conforming to the modern code of conduct at the workplace. Thus, they are observed as struggling with their personal and professional lives in order to achieve a balance between these two domains. As a result of the prevalence of gendered work structure, women are not able to achieve equality despite being educated and employed. In addition, domestic responsibilities still remain a primary role of women, irrespective of their employment status. Women are not able to question or challenge gender role assumptions, even when they are highly educated. Moreover, women utilise their education, keeping their family's interests in mind. In order to ensure that work-family balance and to challenge gender relations, the prevailing social system which relegates women to that of inferior group both at home and at work should be changed.

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