Work Life Balance and Women Professionals

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Abstract - The research attempts to gain insight in to the role of a sample population of women employed in different occupations, in balancing work and life in Tamil Nadu, India. The emphasis is primarily on professionalism and was carried out by conducting a survey among respondents who were first generation women earners. Data were collected by (cluster-random) sampling along with semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. The data was studied and analysed in order to explore and portray the sensitivity of women and their perceptions of the society as well as to highlight the values, attitudes and beliefs of women in the formal work organizations and primary family system. The findings revealed that role conflict, lack of recognition, organizational politics, gender discrimination, elderly and children care issues, quality of health, problems in time management and lack of proper social support are the major factors influencing the WLB of women professionals in India.

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Keywords : work-life balance, role conflict, social support network, organizational politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "work / life balance" could be defined as a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. This term was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for a number of years. Work / life balance initiatives are a global phenomenon. Abraham (2002) stated that women, who work, carry a double load as an employee and housewife. They are super moms playing varied roles and reconciling between tradition and modernity. Employees in global communities also want flexibility and control over their work and personal lives. Van Fleet and Sourage (1984) in their research findings stated that although "women can assume the role of a scientist or a technocrat, they do experience difficulty in having a similar role as housewife or mother". Women in India have struggled to establish an identity and create a life space in social as well as work organizations. Considerable research has highlighted the importance of Work-Life Balance for organizational performance (e.g. Druskat & Wheeler 2003, Durham, Knight & Locke 1997). Work-life balance, in its broadest sense, is defined as a 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life (Hudson, 2005). Hence these practices include flexible work hours (e.g., flex time, which permits workers to vary their start and finish times provided a certain number of hours is worked; small work week, in which employees work a full week's worth of hours in four days and take the fifth off),

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working from home (tele-work), sharing a full-time job between two employees (job sharing), family leave programs (e.g., parental leave, adoption leave, onsite childcare, and financial and/or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services. There are changes in large part due to a significant cultural shift in parental perspective that is, an increased acceptance of giving education to girls that allows for the possibility of women working outside the home, contributing economically to the family and even pursuing a career. With more Indian women in the workforce, a number of rates of female workers in rural areas are 31 percent and 11.6 percent in urban areas. Employment numbers for women, further detailed in women workers in the 21*' century-Unemployment and Underemployment, indicate that of India's 397 million workers, 123.9 million are women: 106 million women are in the rural areas and 18 million in the urban areas. However, only 7 percent of India's labor force is in the organized sector (including workers on regular salaries in registered companies), with the remaining workers (93 percent) in the unorganized or informal sectors. As a brief comparison, in the United States in 2008, of the 121 million women ages 16 years and older, 72 million (59.5 percent) were labor force participants. Women comprised 46.5 percent of the total U.S labor force (68 million women were employed in the United Stats-75 percent of employed women worked in full-time jobs and 25 percent worked on a part-time basis). Women are projected to account for 49 percent of the increase in total labor force between 2006 and 2010. In 2008, the largest percentage of employed women (39 percent) worked in management, professional and related occupations and women accounted for 51 percent of all workers in the high-paying management, professional and related occupation. Globally, the number of women senior managers in large corporations is low. The march 2009 report, women CEOs of the fortune 1000, published by Catalyst (the U.S firm working to expand opportunities for women and business), identifies the women CEOs of the fortme 500 companies. It was found that 15 CEOs are women, including Indian, Indra K. Nooyi, PepsiCo, Inc. The statistics at the CEO level of these large companies clearly show that there is much progress to be made for women worldwide at this level of management. Women India has held important roles in politics, social organizations and administration. There is a need for educated women to reach very high level in the government and the number of women in the corporate sector is gradually growing.

Gulhati (1990) compared the attitudes of male and female managers in India. A study on women managers in public sector organizations by Buddhapriya (1999) provided an insight into their attitude at their workplace. Raman Kumar (1993) had done a study on women executives in banks. A few studies by Preeti Singh [7-9] focused on women employment in the hotel industry in Delhi and on the status of women in the hospitality industry. These studies are relevant from the point of view of understanding women at work. The objective of the present study is to understand the problems that are common to the women employed in different types of industries. Freedman and Greenhaus reveal that women in workforce have increased considerably, however women face a lot of issues and challenges. They are still seen as the primary caretakers of the home and family, even if they work just as much as men. Work role is often seen as secondary to family roles. Not just men but women also hold themselves and other women to the homemaker standard. Women spend more time on housework, child care and family responsibilities. Women used to spend almost 24 percent of their time on housework in 1966 to 30 percent of housework in 2005. However women miss more work for child care. 20 percent of women take care of both children and elders. Greenhaus and Beutell defined work-family conflict as 'a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the two domains, that is, work and family, are mutually non-compatible so that meeting demands in one domain makes it difficult to meet demands in the other'. That is, participation in the work role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family and vice versa. The major concern in this most widely used definition of work-family conflict is that role conflicts cause due to problems of role participation and emotional intelligence. Hence, difference in values, social relationships and requirements between work and family do not constitute conflict per se. Waite and Gallagher documented the tensions within and between dual career couples brought about by the Transformation of marriage and family life. At the personal level, marriage and family functioning have become fundamentally personal choices and responsibilities, making the maintenance of both more vulnerable. At the cultural level, while traditional values such as gender role ideologies are constantly being challenged, balance related to the importance of work life and personal life still persists to role efficacy and emotional intelligence. Landsman'^ disclosed the employer provided resources can help women a great deal in balancing work-life balance issues. It employers provide facilities like onsite child care or referral, it would help in decreasing absenteeism and turnover from work. It would further help in increasing women employee's willingness to work overtime, from work and take-home dinner, family-friendly benefits packages and exercise equipments can help in removing the stress of working women in a big way. A 2005 study of senior women in public and private sector firms, titled women in management in the new economic environment: the case of India, found that women look for work from economic necessity and for personal goals. Women in lower to middle socioeconomic status seek income opportunities and those in the upper middle class pursue a career for professional ambitions. Women with higher education have more interest in independence, are career-oriented and interested in quickly moving up the organizational ladder. The key challenge for career women is managing both their traditional roles as housewives and their career. Women experience great pressure to work hard to prove them in the workplace. Career women frequently express a concern of being inadequately prepared to lead such interventions and feel challenge to take on such a role'. In most of the available literature, the problems faced by Indian women are mainly restricted to technical problems hindering business efforts (Nayyar et al. 2007) or motivation- and stress-related issues (Das, 2001; Lilian, 2009). Meanwhile, the WLB issues of women in India have not been highlighted much in any previous empirical research papers. Even in the international arena, studies on this topic are scarce, especially with regard to developing and underdeveloped countries. The available reports (CIBC, 2004; Godwyn, 2009) mainly discuss developed nations where the prevailing situations are quite different than those of developing and underdeveloped nations (UNIDO, 2001; 2003). The issue of WLB for women in such nations thus needs to be recognised as vitally important to society and as requiring intensive research. Work- Life Balance is an important consequence of the professional world for both men and women. However, in the present paper we are examining the nuances of the construct from the perspective of the women professional. It has been suggested that in examining the relationship between work and personal lives, gender is a significant moderating variable. Whitehouse et al. (2008) state that, even though women participation in the work force is widely accepted, majority of the caring responsibilities of the family lie with the fairer sex. Though the phenomenon has global relevance, the issue is more significant for a developing country like India. As a country surges towards development and enlightenment, its social structure becomes more open and progressive in providing equal opportunities to all members of the society. In India, this development has resulted in better opportunities for the Indian women in terms of education and employment opportunities. Present study deals with not only pressures of being women and being a part of the family in contemporary India, but also with the pressure on organizations to attract and retain women in the work force. The present study is an attempt to gain insight in to the role of a sample population of women employed in different

occupations, in balancing work and life. The emphasis is primarily on professionalism and was carried out by conducting a survey among respondents who were first generation women earners. The respondents were also surveyed on the awareness of various WLB initiatives taken by different organizations. The data collected was studied in order to explore and portray the sensitivity of women and their perceptions of the society as well as to highlight the values, and primary family system. The demands and pressures of work and family may give rise to work-life balance issues to an individual. The changing socio-cultural balances in India and the increase in the number of working women, make the issue more relevant for the study. Work-Life Balance has been studied from two perspectives. The first focuses on work related factors and their impact on family life, while the second perspective focuses on family focused factors and their effect on the work life. This study builds on integration of these two perspectives in investigating both work and family pressure in their influence on the performance of working women. Thus the intention was to cover the vast arena of professions that are most popular with Indian women professional organizations.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the identified research gap, the general objective of the present research was to explore attitudes and beliefs of women in the formal work organizations the WLB challenges faced by women professionals in Tamil Nadu, India. The specific aim was to develop and validate an appropriate instrument to evaluate the WLB issues faced by these women professionals. Based on this instrument, it was sought to analyse the important factors influencing the WLB of women. Additionally, we explored the potential differences in the WLB of women with regard to age, marital status, education level and income

This is a study carried out among women from different sectors and with different professional degrees. In this study, 500 women respondents working in Government sector and private sector organizations were chosen. These organizations included Banks, Colleges and schools. Appropriate questions were posed to the respondents based on three distinct age groups, viz., 25-35 years, 35- 45 years and 45-60 years respectively. The preliminary data needed for the development of the psychometric instrument were collected from the respondents via qualitative methods such as observation, elaborate semi-structured interviews involving open-ended questions and in-depth discussions regarding WLB issues. These qualitative methods were intended to explore the diversity and intensity of the problem and its possible dimensions among the interviewees.

The outcome of these interviews helped in developing the research instrument for the study which was pilot tested. The instrument consisted of scales measuring job satisfaction, domestic pressures,

organizational commitment, work stress, work pressure and reward and recognition, using a five point Likert scale. These respondents were inquired to assess the i) level of their motivation and job satisfaction, and commitment ii) relationship with their subordinates, iii) commitment to their profession, iv) time constraints, v) factors affecting their job mobility, vi) job preference, , vii) constraints posed by marriage, ix) social life, x) domestic responsibilities and xi) child care. The data obtained from the filled in questionnaires was subjected to both reliability and validity tests. The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the scale. The KMO and the Bartlett's test were found to be significant amongst the respondents

III. FINDINGS

a) Age Distribution

i. Percentage Analysis

In the sample of 500 women, 56 % belonged to the age group 22-35 y, 34 % to the age group 35-45 y and 10 % fell in the age group 45-60 y. There were many women teachers and accountants in these age groups. 91% of the respondents were working in the government sector and only 9 % belonged to the private sector. These details are indicated in table 1. 44 % of the women in the private sector in the age group of 45 – 60 years were in teaching profession. In the age group of 35-45 years in the private sector, 33 % were in the teaching profession and 11% were in day care centers.

b) Women at Work

i. Motivation, job satisfaction and commitment

Many studies in the past have shown that a woman's abstinence from employment is a symbol of high social status. All respondents in this study belonged to a family income group of above 4, 00,000 per annum, which is a high middle-income group in India. This testifies the fact that women do take up jobs in order to acquire a good social status. The questions that were framed to assess were based on Maslow's [10] hypothesis. The response could be grouped and classified as given in Table 2.

The respondents considered compensation, job security, power and status as the major factors for motivating them. Working conditions were rated 4th in the order of preference. Most respondents did not give a higher ranking for job satisfaction. The factor job satisfaction was last in the order of preference.

The compensation at entry point was definitely very important for women as it paved the way for promotions and further incentives. Most women liked public sector jobs, which gave them job security but not job satisfaction. Job security was ranked 2nd in preferences among 90 % of women.

Job commitment was extremely important to them. In fact, they preferred positions of power with responsibility. Unmarried women were extremely

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devoted to their jobs but married women felt that their domestic compulsions held them back from complete devotion.

Most women worked between 6 hours to 8 hours at their workplace. They felt that time was the biggest constraint because of the 'role conflict' between 'family' & 'work life'. All the respondents gave first preference to a pleasant home and family life, while making the most of their ability took the second place. They gave third preference to challenges and excitement in job and the last place to forging ahead in the world. There appeared to be a role conflict between work life and family responsibility.

ii. *Time Constraint and job mobility*

The women worked for almost 8 hrs a day at office and were still remorse about the fact that men could stay on late at work and do networking and liaison, which helped in job promotions. Often married women felt that promotions were slow and rewards and returns on jobs were not co-existent with hard work. Social evenings and networking formed important aspects of professional life and helped in furthering a career. Women were not able to extensively participate in such activities.

Women found it difficult to travel with home responsibilities and with children. Unmarried women also had some opposition from parents. The experience shared by women is that they prefer to remain in the small job positions rather than take a transfer and job promotion due to domestic compulsions. Women have however, had to leave jobs or take long leave without salaries when the husband gets transferred. Even though single girls (age 22-35 y) could live alone, eventually they have to leave a job and start a new career after marriage. This is because the occupational prestige of a husband is considered to be more important in Indi

iii. *Relationship with subordinates and job preference*

Young women between the age group of 22-35 years are more aggressive than women in older age groups. According to them they do not have any problems with their male colleagues, as they are equally well qualified and are getting equal salaries. They do have problems with males who are subordinate to them as acceptance of a women boss is still 'new' in Indian conditions. In this study the sample population included 10 managers in the banking industry (public sector) in the age group of 45-60 years.

The respondents were asked about their opinion on job preferences for women in India.70 % of the women responded that although they earned a good salary but there were time and social constraints. Teaching jobs, part time jobs or jobs with flexible timings would be more suitable in the present Indian scenario. Most women felt that they were being treated well by their family owing to their contributions in the

families' financial resources. They were also more independent to take decisions in making investments or purchases than the non-working women. For reasons of independence they wanted to hold on to their jobs even at the same level without any promotions.

c) *Women and family life*

i. *Marriage and social life*

In India the institution of marriage is considered to be very important for women. The marriageable age is between 20 – 25 years. Gainful employment and career pursuit does delay marriage among employed women. In a study by Vohra and Sen [11], it has been established that gainful employment does affect the time period of marriage of a women. There are some findings on the marriage system by Prakash and Rao [12]. This study explored the influence of women employment on the tradition by which a marriage is arranged in India. This study showed that 25 % among the working women are now finding their own partners in marriage despite parental opposition. The rest 75% of women still continue to wait for their parents to arrange their marriages. One similarity in the changing scenario in marriage by choice or arranged marriage was that women were being married between the ages of 26-30 years. Both married and unmarried women in all age groups were of the opinion that their official commitment does limit their social life, hobbies and meeting their friends and relatives. They opined that the supportive role played by their parents or husbands is essential in order to forego such social obligations.

ii. *House Hold Pressures and Responsibilities*

All the respondents were of the view that many decisions were being taken jointly at home on financial matters while the household chores are still largely the responsibility of women. While husband or parents were free to pursue their hobbies and sports the woman is not given as much freedom since there is very less gender equality in India. 3.4 Work life balance.

iii. *Single child families and child rearing*

All the respondents agreed that one of the methods of combining work and family life was to have only one child, whether male or female. This again is a courageous pioneering effort of women since 'male' child is generally preferred in India and families have at least two children. Due to breaking up of joint families and entering into nuclear family systems, it is difficult to leave the child alone at home and there is a lack of childcare facilities in India. Often working women have to take the help of their elderly relatives in order to rear their children. Women find this a very difficult stage of life and only 30 % women feel that husbands are supportive. If women are able to sustain their jobs during the child-rearing period then they find it less difficult to continue working in challenging jobs.

iv. *The compromises made by the working women*

From their responses it is evident that the married women have to compromise on career growth, hobbies, social life and academic pursuit for maintaining a peaceful home. They had to take vacation in short stints in order to spend time with their children when they need them. These compromises lead to stress, exhaustion and guilt complex in women.

IV.   Regression Analysis

The results for women professionals indicate that 49.2% of variations in Work- Life Balance are explained by set of six independent variables (Table1). The impact of work pressure emerged to be statistically significant at 5% level. Further, it has a negative impact on Work- Life Balance. Thus if an individual believes that she is overburdened in her job and is not able to manage her other roles there is bound to be discomfort and will lead to a sense of disquiet and lead to a reduced Work-life balance.

V.   Conclusion

Women are increasing in professionally trained educational institutes and in organizations. This study has explored some of the issues at work and home and how women have combined their careers with family life. The findings of the study are actual responses of the women and the following conclusions can be drawn:

There is a distinct new trend in work orientation. More women who join the organization are from financially sound families. They are committed to their jobs and enjoy positions of responsibility, but they are faced with problems of mobility and slow promotions due to time constraints and family responsibilities. They also face problems in relationships with male subordinates. The study shows that there is some change leading to emancipation of women as they are increasingly getting married by choice of partners than through arranged marriages and entering into inter-caste, inter-religious choices. The age of marriage is also shifting from 22 to 26-30years of age. However, parents' condition married women and society to accept their roles as subordinates to 'husband' and the 'home' and 'children' as their share of responsibility. Unmarried women have fewer problems but they have constraints on socializing with friends and family. Change in Indian society is slow, but women have definitely started working towards social change by courageously shifting from traditional rules of marriage to modernity.

Women combine work and family life with the help of 'mother' or 'mother in law' accepting the concept of one child and giving birth to a child only after settling in a job. They also give quality time to children and do not give priority to promotions and career growth. Unmarried women are able to do better because they do not have home responsibilities. It is absolutely true that women find it difficult to shed their role as housewife or mother because of the conditioning by parents that the primary duty of the woman is 'her home'. The male in India is excluded from this responsibility. Gender equality will take a long time to be established in India.

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Table 1 : Estimated Regression equation results (Dependent variable: Work Life Balance)

S.No	Respondents	Constant	JS	DP	OC	WS	WP	R	R2	F
1	Women Professionals	4.4	.089	-.12	.165	-.058	.307	.101	.492	10.984

Table 2 : Sector wise distribution of the respondents

Age	Government Sector	Private Sector
22-35	240	-
35-45	145	25
45-60	30	20
Total	455	45

Table 3 : Factors motivating women at work

Motivating factors							Total No.
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Compensation	270	15	215	-	-	-	500
Job Security	5	10	30	30	42	-	500
Power & Status	15	30	405	-	50	-	500
Working Conditions	-	-	-	-	50	450	500
Perks & Incentives	15	450	35	-	-	-	500
Job Satisfaction	-	215	10	190	60	25	500