Work family Challenges and their Impact on Career Advancement: A Study of Indian Women Executives

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Admittedly, in the current environment of today, the place of women is becoming concertedly visible. She is treading every domain of activities with self-belief and proven competences. Her forays into the male monopoly of executive role in management affairs have registered a significant success in spite of so many constraints in her march to hierarchical position. The present paper discuss the barriers face by the female, which is been consider as the most important reasons inhibiting women's rise to the top positions in management is the work-life conflict that women professionals experience. The primary objective of this study is to understand the impact of family responsibilities on the career decisions of women professionals and also to find out the type of work-life support they would require from their employers as well as their family to balance their work and life in a better manner. The study is conducted with 270 women professionals working in Educational sector, health care sector, banking, call centre, insurance sector and few government offices. The findings depict an overall negative picture of women professional in the selected sector. Women still face subtle discrimination and evaluation of their performance tends to be predicted against them. The result would help to eradicate various obstacle that female professional face by enhancing the awareness of the factors that inhibit their advancement in the corporate world.

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Introduction

 The under-representation of women at workplace long after women secured justifiable rights of participation in formal workplace intrigues researcher and academician. The recent trends suggesting that female professional have been successful as activists in corporate dictatorship in environmental causes in India. Yet, majorities in formal authority have eluded women everywhere. Women constitute the majority of partisan leadership activists in the Indian corporate sector but never obtained a majority in the representation at the senior and top management levels.

Catalyst (2007) describes that organizations with supplementary female Board of Directors encompass elevated Return on Sales (42%), Return on Equity (53%), and Return on Invested Capital (66%) than those hem in the negligible representation of female on board. But on the contrary, results discuss that female professionals consist of title of chairman, CEO, COO and executives vice president remain at about 7 percent of the population of executives in the United States (Catalyst, 2007). Somehow India also demonstrates the identical depiction. Large Indian companies appear to be sheathing behind when it comes to gender diversity in their top administrative bodies. Studies reveal that there are only handfuls of women who have broken the glass ceiling. One of the reasons posited by researchers for fewer women in senior leadership positions is that women face difficult situations because of competing demands between job and family life and are unable to compete on level playing field.

In these endeavors, noteworthy are the altering mindsets in proposing and handling issues of assortment and inclusivity. Undoubtedly, promotion of gender assortment has yielded multiple changes in the behavioural and working styles of men and women with the work environment becoming more comprehensive. Research discusses that female as a category of professional necessitates exceptional spotlight and analysis, while the contribution of female professional is steadily diluted.

An extensive analysis of accessible prose on work-life conflict and barriers to women's career advancement suggests that biological difference transcend all boundaries and gets

reflected in attitudes and behaviours clubbed under binary heads as "male" and "female. Female professional still continue to have the primary responsibility of taking care of the children and household needs and expected to sacrifice career progression for the family life and also have to deal with the glass ceiling that prevents them from moving upwards in the organization. A recent *New York Times* article titled, "Backlash: Women Bullying Women at Work," asked the following question: "How can women break through the glass ceiling if they are ducking verbal blows from other women in cubicles, hallways and conference rooms?" (Meece, 2009). Additional research on same gender bias can also help in the development of training programmes that encourage women to better understand each other's needs and goals at the workplace.

The present study deals with an effort to understand the impact of work-family challenges on female professionals' career graph and also to understand the type of work-life support they would require from their employers well from their home as to balance their work and life in a better manner.

Literature Framework

The growing number of professional women at workplace in India, is has been accompanied by a steady growth in dual career families (Komarraju, 1997) who try to manage work and non-work domains simultaneously. Despite obtaining access to a professional career, women in India have remained segregated in predominately female occupation, in lower ranks of organistion and barred from moving up in the hierarchy (Budhwar et al., 2005).

Researches indicted that major obstacle which hinder the women to be on the top position is the critical balancing act of combining a family and a career (Goel, 2003; Patil 2002; Gupta et al., 1998; Maini, 1997; and Chow 1995). Although men also face this challenge of balancing work and other priorities, it affects women more since they do most of the work associated with the household activities, apart from taking care of children, older family members, and other dependents. Though multiple roles in work and family can be the source of multiple satisfactions for employed women (Crosby 1987), a combination of career and family roles is often associated with conflict, overload, and stress (Frone, Russel and Cooper, 1991; 1992; Lewis and Cooper, 1987; 1988).

According to Loughlin (1999), there are vast amount of available literature on barriers to women's career progression. Three key themes, human resource management, organisational culture and family issues, were identified as factors that affects women's and men's career differently.

ILO (1998) reported that women are typically placed in non-strategic sectors rather than in professional and line management jobs leading to slow career progression. Linehan and Scullion (2001) mentioned that many jobs are still seen as men's or women's jobs and this influences the initial intake of a particular gender to organisations. Formality of the human resource management processes underpins fair practice and informality can result in unequal treatment of employees. Unstructured informal processes that have comparatively low validity, such as the unstructured selection interview, are still used by the majority of organizations (Wood, and Lindorff (2001). Informal recruitment processes can also lead to bias because recruiters tend to determine job requirements according to the current job-holder's gender (Powell 1088). If the current job-holder is male (or female) and displays certain characteristics and abilities, then these features are determined as being necessary to the job. This sort of process tends to limit the number of women applicants for "men's" jobs and vice versa. This reinforces occupational segregation and contributes to building stereotypical views of men and women's roles and abilities.

Social support has consistently emerged as an important factor that influences the female professional in a positive way. Social support may come from an employee's partner, sibling, children and friends (Marcinkus, Whelan and Gorden, 2007). But unfortunately, although Indian husbands are supportive of their wives' participation in the workforce, they are yet to assume responsibility for sharing domestic chores (Ramu, 1989). In India, instrumental support for most working women come in the form of hired domestic helps or female members of extended families. Although hired domestic helps in urban areas of India have been noted to be expensive and unreliable, they still continue to be a major source of support for the growing number of nuclear families who live far from their relatives (Sekaran, 1992).

Organizational support i.e. the support from supervisors and co-workers is considered as a critical element of work- home balance. Organizational and supervisor understanding of family duties are positively related to women work family life and the satisfaction level of female

professionals (Ezra and Deckman, 1996). Organizations offer wide range of work-family options like creating unconventional career paths with flexible work schedules, job-sharing, imaginative use of IT to allow telecommuting, facilitating re-entry of women through crash training programmes, providing dependable child care facilities, etc. (Lobel and Kossek, 1996; Rajadhyaksha and Smita, 2004).

Exclusion of female professional from informal network is also considered as a major obstacle to a career progression (Gupta et al., 1998; All India Management Association, 1998). Researches suggests that after a career break, women are more disadvantaged in their job searches than men as they are less integrated with professional networks, especially in male-dominated organizations (Zikic, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2008). Family responsibilities may leave women with less time to devote to networking and job searches (Zikic, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2008).

Organizational culture which is underpinned by values, can negatively affect women. Family commitments of employees can have an influence on the way in which they are perceived by their co-workers, including managers. Work-family conflicts experienced when pressures from work and family roles are mutually incompatible, such that participation in one role makes it difficult to participate in the other (Liu and Wilson, 2001). Sheth (1997) reveled that male employees could not accept the idea to work under a female professional.

A labour study indicates that women career progression seems to be blocked by an invisible barrier "glass ceiling" that keeps women from rising above certain level in organizations created by corporate tradition and prejudice (Crampton and Misra, 2000). The term glass ceiling was coined in 1980s, refers to an invisible but impermeable barrier that limits the career advancement of female particularly in medium and large organizations (Burke, 2004). Glass ceiling is the barrier of tradition, invisible rules and undiscussed conventions created by men to keep women in their place (Stern, 1995). It is a metaphor for the invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the upper echelons of the management.

Women's awareness towards their career path is also important factor (Jackson, 2001; Scheuermann et. al, 1998). Although they are qualified as their male counterparts, sometimes they need to work harder and perform better to obtain senior positions (Still, 1994; and Maddock, 2002). Several researchers found that women managers are more susceptible to role

stress due to the multiple role demands inherent in running a career while also running a home and family (Collins, 1993; and Scheuermann et. al. 1998). In the long run, however, the success for these women is often at substantial cost to their personal lives. Due to demanding job, they have to work very long hours and may have to forgo long-term relationships and the opportunity to have children if they wish to progress to the top of the profession.

Objective of the study

The main purpose of the study is to fulfill following:-

- To study the organizational barrier against women career advancement to the senior position.
- To find out the impact of family responsibility on female professional's career.
- To study the organizational support to manage the work family life of female professional.

Research Methodology

The present research comprised of 270 female professional employees with the help of purposive random sampling. The sample was from taken from Educational sector, health care sector, banking, call centre, insurance sector and few government offices. In addition to this, responses were also collected from female professionals working in north India. A structured questionnaire was developed to meet the objective. It comprised of three parts— obstacle face by the female professional to career advancement to higher level, effect of family responsibility on career advancement of female professionals, organizational support for women career advancement ; and family support and for women career advancement. Respondents were asked to judge the factors/statements through a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." For data calculation, "strongly agree" was given 5 points and "strongly disagree" was given 1 point. Apart from this, data was also collected through interviews to have a greater understanding of the issues. Frequencies, Percentage, Average, Standard Deviation.

Respondents' Profile

Out of 270 female professionals, 16 (5.9%) were in government services, 43 (15.9) were in education sector, 32 (11.8%) were in healthcare services, 89 (32.9%) were in banking sector, 35 (12.9%) were in call centers and 55 (20.4%) were in insurance sector. In terms of managerial hierarchy, 12.3 per cent were at senior level, 50.6 per cent at middle level, and 37.1 per cent at junior level. A large number of respondents were in the age group of 31-40 (49.3%), followed by the age group of 25-30 (30.4%). 17.4 per cent of the respondents were in the age group of 41-50 and only 2.9 per cent were in the age group of 51 and above. Majority of the respondents (79.6%) were married. Only 16 per cent of the respondents were unmarried and 4.4 per cent of them were single (either widow or separated). More than 79 per cent of the female professionals were living in nuclear families and the remaining were living in a joint family system. A large percentage of the respondents had either one (40.4%) or two (13.7%) children. In terms of profession of their spouses, a significant percentage, i.e. 65.2 per cent were in service, and 12.2 per cent were in business sector.

The findings of the study are discussed below:

Obstacle face by the female professional to Career Advancement

In the line with the findings of various studies discussed above, the present study indicates that some of the important reasons that restrict upward mobility of female professional are:

- Gender differentiation
- Gender stereotyping
- Work-family conflict
- Organizational culture
- Lack of network access
- Glass ceiling

The opinion of the female professionals towards all these factors was studied in detail. These factors have been isolated as they tend to have direct impact on the perception of female professionals. The result of the study revealed that out of the six factors, 'glass ceiling' was perceived by most female professionals as a very important barrier to their advancement to senior positions. Almost 94 percent of the respondents agreed (taking 'strongly agree' and

'agree' categories together) that glass ceiling hindered female's advancement to senior positions (Table1).

Although almost 6 percent of the female professionals are neutral on the factor of 'glass ceiling' but majority of them believe that even the freedom of career and an overdose of western influence in their minds have not been able to erode the invincible & invisible glass ceiling from their mind. Gender stereotyping was also perceived as an important factor for restricting the career growth of the female professionals. Nearly 64 percent of the respondents strongly agree to this.

Some of the women professionals (who had grown-up children or had strong support system to assist them in taking care of their family responsibilities) stated that they did not experience 'work family conflict' as a barrier to move to the senior level. However, they still perceived/believed that due to family responsibilities, many women professionals would not be able to reach to the top positions. This finding reconfirmed the finding of some of the earlier studies in India that women in India experienced considerable pressure to do all that was necessary for the family before going out to work and after work. Lack of network access by the female professionals was also perceived as an important factor for restricting the career growth of the female professionals. Majority of the respondents agreed to this. Few of them who are were on the senior position respond that their colleagues and bosses were sensitive to family problems but the organizations in which they were working did not have clear policies with regard to work-life issues.

Table 1: Obstacle face by the female professional to Career Advancement

Barriers	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender Differentiation	170 62.96%	82 30.37%	18 6.67%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	24.5	4.18
Gender	175	86	9	0	0	28.4	4.8

Stereotyping	64.81%	31.85%	3.33%	0.00%	0.00%		
Work-family Conflict	149 55.19%	100 37.04%	17 6.30%	4 1.48%	0 0.00%	15.5	2.9
Organizational Culture	149 55.19%	101 37.41%	14 5.19%	6 2.22%	0 0.00%	15.3	2.7
Lack of Network Access	141 52.22%	114 42.22%	14 5.19%	1 0.37%	0 0.00%	15.48	2.6
Glass Ceiling	197 72.96%	56 20.74%	17 6.30%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	33.75	5.1

Family responsibility and female career advancement

The present research hunted to evaluate the effect of family responsibility on female professionals' career decisions through an analysis of their perceptions on various family responsibilities. The respondents were provided with six different statements pertaining to family responsibility and their views sought on how their career was impacted by them (Table 2).

The results revealed that a significant percentage (87.41%) of women professionals felt that they are expected to perform dual responsibility as career provider, especially in maternal role and family responsibility as well as professional responsibility. It is generally seen in Indian society, although female is living in neutral family or in joint family, she still have to take care of her family as well as full her social obligation. A very large number of female professional in this study felt that becoming career conscious leads to family disapproval and rejection hence hindered the prospects of career advancement for women professionals. In many cases, they felt women were required to devote a significant portion of their time to fulfil the family commitments which made it difficult for them to concentrate on their career growth.

Very important 83.70% of women professionals felt that the due to family responsibilities female professionals are not able to maintain a harmonious work relationship and superior

performance, by which their superior feels that they are not able to cope with the changing environmental scenario. It is a well recognized fact that there should a link between women board directors and corporate performance across industries. Differences in vision and mission can help us identify what would work best for an organization, subsequently; present study shows that 83.70% of women professionals felt that they are not able to perform well due to their family responsibilities. Result reveals that due to the childhood socialization, female have to compromise again and again on their professional front in the form of either intermittent break in their careers or making suboptimal choices of work roles, so that they could take care of their various familial responsibilities also. Very significant proportion of the female respondents responds that are expected to sacrifice career progression for their family life. It is very normally seen that husband's career is been given more priority as compare to female professional. In the traditional perspective of life roles, husband was the provider and wife was the homemaker and enabler. More than 82% of the respondents suggest that dual responsibility influence the performance orientation and skill of female professional they are unable to utilize their potentials because of family responsibility. This is a very important finding of the study.

Table 2: Effect of Family Responsibility on Career advancement of female Professionals

Barriers	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Dis Agree (1)	Mean	Stand. Dev.
It is expected that female professionals should perform dual responsibility as career provider, especially in maternal role and family responsibility	236 87.41%	24 8. 89%	10 3. 70%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23.8	3.88
Dual responsibility influence the performance orientation	222 82.22%	36 13.33%	12	0	0	23.10	3.84

and skill of female professional			4.44%	0.00%	0.00%		
They are expected to sacrifice career progression for their family life	223 82.59%	32 11.85%	15 5.56%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23.17	4.0
Becoming career conscious leads to family disapproval and rejection	235 87.04%	24 8.89%	11 4.07%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23.68	3.81
Female professionals are not able to perform well due to their family responsibilities	226 83.70%	29 10.74%	15 5.56%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23.12	3.88
Due to family responsibilities female professionals are not able to maintain a harmonious work relationship and superior performance.	226 83.70%	29 10.74%	15 5.56%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23.14	3.96

Organizational Support and Women career advancement

The present study indicates that Organizational support, is been considered as a critical dimension influencing one's decision to move or stay in the organization. Sometimes strained relationship with superiors and peers forced female professionals to look for other options. However, organizational support, especially when a couple had young children, emerged as a decisive factor for women's stay or quit decisions.

The findings suggest that 66 per cent of the respondents believed that they would require 'crash training programmes', whereas 63.70 per cent said that 'Flexible working schedule' could be considered as an important provision for women professionals with younger kids or any other pressing family responsibilities. Sixty per cent of them emphasized on the need for 'Job sharing'

at workplace and 59.63 per cent expected their employers to provide them 'Flexible working environment', on the other hand 57.41 emphasize upon Inclusion of female professionals in formal as well as informal network.

If one were to analyze the findings, the preference for Child care facility by fairly large number respondents indicates that a few women respondents with young children, who fortunately worked in supportive organizations could continue with their careers. But many young mothers had to take a career break during the child-bearing and child-rearing stages as they found it difficult to manage the work and family fronts simultaneously without organizational support. The reason why only 63 per cent of the respondents suggested Flexible work schedule would be because they have to shoulder many responsibilities at home, flexible working schedule allow them to manage the familial challenges in a better way rather than feel compelled to remain absent from work.

The findings suggest that in order to reduce the avoidable loss of their talented women employees. Organizations can consider options like creating unconventional career paths with inclusion of female professionals in formal as well as informal network, job-sharing, imaginative use of IT to allow telecommuting, facilitating re-entry of women through crash training programmes, providing dependable child care facilities, etc.

Very large percentages of respondents favored the idea of "Crash training programmes" in order to motivate the female professionals for working. They expected their employer to provide some sort of counseling / mentoring to the employees who experienced work-family challenges. Interestingly this finding suggests that most of the women professionals covered under this study were ready to learn and bring about desirable changes in themselves through these crash training programmes for attaining a better balance between their professional and personal lives.

Table 3: Organizational Support for Women career advancement

Organizational Support	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Agree (1)	Mean	Stand. Dev.

Flexible working schedule	17 6.30%	172 63.70%	65 24.07%	16 5.93%	0 0.00%	18.6	4.1
Flexible working environment	25 9.26%	161 59.63%	72 26.67%	12 4.44%	0 0.00%	18.9	4.0
Inclusion of female professionals in formal as well as informal network	28 10.37%	155 57.41%	67 24.81%	20 7.41%	0 0.00%	18.8	4.4
Job sharing	25 9.26%	163 60.37%	75 27.78%	7 2.59%	0 0.00%	19.07	3.9
Child care facilities	26 9.63%	170 62.96	58 21.48%	16 5.93%	0 0.00%	19.1	3.9
Crash training programmes	42 15.56%	179 66.30%	43 15.93%	6 2.22%	0 0.00%	20.2	3.4

Family support and women career advancement

Managing work-family challenges is not only a responsibility of an organization; it is also the responsibility of the female professional's family members. When the respondents were asked to answer whether they expect their family to support them in their efforts to achieve better work-life balance, most of the respondents said they would like to have certain work-life balance provisions from their family (Table 4).

The findings suggests that majority of female professionals believe that they are not getting adequate support from their family.78.89 per cent (Strongly disagree and disagree included) of the respondents were of the view that late hours working is not happily acceptable to their family members. 20.74 percent of the respondents strongly disagree that their family life is happy.

The findings suggest that more than 65 per cent of the respondents feel that they have to make most of the adjustments as their husband (65.19 % strongly disagree and disagree included) and children (65.18% strongly disagree and disagree included) do not adjust their needs to suit females' job programmes. Although most of the females agree that their husbands (37.04%) and other family members (46.30%) appreciate twin responsibility handling by female professionals but traditionally a female is expected to spend more hours in household work than men. Female managers consistently report significantly higher job/family role conflict, which may be accompanied by higher mental and physiological strains than men managers.

Table 4: Family Support for Women career advancement

Family Support	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean	Stand. Dev.
Does your husband adjust his needs to suit your job programmes	0 0.00%	28 10.37%	66 24.44%	124 45.93%	52 19.26%	23.2	6.1
Do your children adjust their needs to suit your programme	0 0.00%	24 8.89%	70 25.93%	120 44.44%	56 20.74%	23.7	6.72
Does your husband appreciate that you are holding two responsibilities, the house and the job	52 19.26%	100 37.04%	73 27.04%	35 12.96%	10 3.70%	13.87	6.6
Do the children and other family members appreciate that you are holding two responsibilities, the house and the job	47 17.41%	125 46.30%	64 23.70%	30 11.11%	4 1.48%	15.82	9.57
Do you feel that your family life is happy	0 0.00%	23 8.52%	91 33.70%	100 37.04%	56 20.74%	22.6	6.6

Sometimes when you have overtime on late hours on job do the family members accept it without grudge	0 0.00%	16 5.93%	41 15.18%	150 55.56%	63 23.33%	24.7	5.8
Do you feel that you have most agreeably synchronized your role as a housewife with the role of the working woman	0 0.00%	25 9.26%	71 26.29%	137 50.74%	37 13.70%	22.7	6.2

Implication of the findings

The present study plays a pertinent role to find out the obstacle that female professionals face during their career and how family responsibilities and social obligation influence their career decisions. The results of the present study coincide with the findings of Jameli et al., 2005; Kattara, 2005; Goel, 2003; and All India Management Association, 1998. Current study reveals that the constraints which prevent female professionals from advancing to top management positions, are constraints of an attitudinal (gender stereotyping) and structural nature, that stem them from the upper position in the corporate environment.

An important finding of the present study indicate that majority of the female professionals respond that how family responsibility would affect their career decisions. They appeared to think that they were not able to utilize their full potential and at times they have to close their career chapter because of the family responsibilities. It is because that putting career more important leads to social censure and denunciation. They felt that Indian society follow a philosophy "good housewife who took care of the husband and children". It is very important to notice that few women respondents with young children could continue with their careers. But

many young mothers had to take a career break during the child-bearing and child-rearing stages as they found it difficult to manage the work and family fronts simultaneously.

More than half of the respondents felt that gender differentiation by the employer also acted as a barrier to their professional progress. It seems that the women professionals, who participated in the study, were not very satisfied with the gender-differentiation policies of their employers. So, the organizations need to acknowledge the dual responsibilities of female professionals and the need to develop a system where they can establish a balance and best utilize their potential.

The present research indicates that the expectations of the employee-related workplace policies and practices rest on the age-old assumption of male employees having a dependable support system back home, run presumably by their wives to take care of their familial responsibilities and also personal needs, allowing them time and energy to focus exclusively on their professional contribution and growth. Women professionals under study agreed that support provisions contributed to better work-life balance**.**

Lack of network access is considered to be the most influential factor in existence of glass ceiling. Female professionals argue that they lack both internal and external network access e.g. governmental, professional and social. They do not benefit from informal interaction to the same extent as do their male counterparts. Men get together for luncheons, coffees, sports, informal conversations and so forth, while the female professionals are often left out of such activities. These above findings are in line with the findings of Kattara, 2005; Goel, 2003; Marzolini, 2001; Li and Leung 2001; Sheth, 1997; and Catalyst Women Organisation 1993. Female professionals perceive that due to their exclusion from informal networks they have limited opportunities to socialize with influential executives who could help their career development.

To conclude, it can be said that women professionals have not achieved as much as men have. The can be explained by the fact that certain attitudinal and structural constraints have hampered their progress. Female professionals who aspire for career advancement have to face

several barriers. Lack of network access, gender discrimination and a complex set of stereotypes and attitudes held by member of society act as obstacles to their advancement as professionals.

A shift in the attitudes along with formal support is a basic pre-requisite if organizations are interested in increasing female participation in management and administrative roles. The promotion of work values and cultures that show little tolerance for stereotypical attitudes and preconceptions that discriminate against women must be ensured. Change in organizational policies can help women to shatter attitudinal glass ceiling that they encounter throughout their careers. It is hoped that the results would help alleviate the challenges that female professionals face by increasing awareness and illustrating the predominance of several factors inhibiting women's advancement to top corporate positions.

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