Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Statement of the Problem

The state of Kerala is a mostly industrialized and urbanized, but, a relatively traditional one in terms of the structure and culture of family. As a family centered society the dilemma between career and family put pressure on women in Kerala. At the level of reality, the present day Kerala woman is confronted with several significant questions. Firstly, to work towards her work and career goal. Secondly, to sort out and fulfill the expectations of her domestic roles as wife and mother, and, thirdly, to manage the problems arising out of meeting the obligations and requirements of these two separate spheres.

The prevalent societal values and norms directly as well as indirectly teach women and men that women’s primary domain is the family and that looking after the family is their primary duty. Consequently, women are prone to assign high priority to domestic roles. Such a frame of mind is all right as long as the women are not working. But for working women, and a professional, it would pose an array of problems. The pressure of societal norms to prioritise family role and work overload due to dual role, lead to role conflict among women professionals. Besides, there are certain ‘work situations’ like, lack of flexibility in working conditions, lack of decision-making power, or, authority, and discrimination at work, that create role- conflict among women professionals. The present study took this into consideration and studies work-family conflict from the family domain and work domain.
The fact of being married and having a family imposes certain restrictions on women professionals. These can manifest as constraints or challenges for them. The exploration of the constraints women professionals’ experience, as well as the challenges they face, by virtue of playing the dual –role come under the purview of this study. The performance of dual - role is supposed to result in role conflict and it therefore, assume a significant theme of the present study. Nevertheless, this study has an added dimension; it seeks to examine the issue of role conflict ensuing from the socialization experiences also. The conceptual framework is derived from Symbolic Interaction and Gender Inequality theories.

The incumbency of the professional role has enhanced the status of professional women and has provided them with opportunities for self- expression. But simultaneously, it has also placed an arduous burden on them since most women professionals continue to adhere to the domestic obligations most faithfully, while shouldering the professional role. In order to cope with the situation, they formulate their own strategies. This study attempts to find out the coping mechanisms that facilitate women professionals to manage their dual - roles.

The present study is titled ‘work-life balance of women professionals in Kerala’. It attempts to analyse the problems encountered by married women professionals by virtue of combining family and career roles and to understand how they achieve equilibrium between family and profession. Women in different professions - medicine, engineering, law and accounting - are studied in order to understand the common as well as the unique problems experienced, and the strategies adopted to balance family and professional roles by all women professionals.
4.2 Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of women professionals in Kerala, regarding their family and professional roles, within an understanding of the issues that they regard as enabling or constraining them in achieving family and work life balance. The study intends to find out whether the high educational and professional status of these women alters their traditional domestic role. The women in the professions, by virtue of their high education are thought to be ‘liberated’ and ‘empowered’ and hence are expected to challenge the age-old gender roles and the related value systems. With this assumption, the study intends to portray the perceptions and experiences of the women professionals in their dual role performance. The study also seeks to examine the strategies these women employ in their efforts to achieve work-life balance.

The specific objectives are the following.

1. To study the family and work life of the women professionals through personal, family and work domain variables.

2. To examine the relative importance of career and family roles to women professionals.

3. To identify the factors that enable or constrain women professionals’ performance in both these roles.

4. To examine the issue of dual role conflict among the women professionals in Kerala

5. To examine the prevalence and the impact of gender discrimination in the career prospects of women professionals in Kerala
6. To examine the strategies adopted for achieving work-life balance of women professionals.

4.3 Hypotheses

1. Socialisation into female sex role is negatively related to women’s career achievement patterns and aspirations.

2. The stronger the identity with familial (gender) roles, the greater will be the conflict.

3. Spouse - Support is negatively associated with dual role conflict

4. Family domain is a greater source of conflict than work domain for women professionals.

5. ‘Glass-ceiling’ blocks the career prospects of women professionals.

6. The paucity of women in top positions in the professions is the result of both social constraints and of discriminations at work place.

4.4 Variables

The present study is concerned with understanding the issues regarding the family and career lives of women professionals. Work-life balance has been set up as the dependent variable and the factors that can influence or determine it are identified as independent variables. The independent variables have been classified into three domains - personal, family and work- as per their focus and are discussed below.

Age, Religion, Income and Family Pattern are the ‘personal domain’ independent variables in this study. Age is considered an important variable, because role conflict, gender discrimination and coping strategies could vary between different age groups. Religion is also a significant variable, because the status of women and their roles are known to differ
in different religions. (It is not religion per se that is involved, but its cultural implications alone.) The religious groups in this study are Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. It is a well-documented fact that professional women lean on their family for support. At the same time family duties may prove to be too demanding for them so much so, it would make them poor performers in the profession. These considerations led to the inclusion of ‘family pattern’ as a variable in the study. Nuclear, Extended and Joint- are the different family patterns.

Spouse’s profession, Spouse’s support, Family support and Age of children are the ‘family domain’ variables in this study. These are chosen as variables because earlier studies depicted each of them as decisive in determining the intensity of role conflict among workingwomen in general (Holmstrom 1972).

The variables in the ‘work domain’ are Organizational position, Years of service, Work schedule, and Sector of work. Assuming that both role conflict and gender discrimination could vary depending on the above factors, these variables are included in this study.

All the above-mentioned variables are significant from the work–life balance perspective also since they determine The perceptions and experience of dual role as well as the strategies adopted by the women professionals in achieving work-life balance.

4.5 Clarification of concepts

4.5.1 Work-life Balance

Clark (2000) defined work-life balance as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict”. Accordingly, the phrase, work-life balance is understood in this study, as
the strategies adopted at home and / or at work in order to lessen role conflict and achieve work-life balance.

4.5.2 Profession

According to the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (1993), profession is “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as in the scientific, historical or, scholarly principles underlying such skills and methods, maintaining by force of organisation or concerted opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has as its prime purpose the rendering of a public service.”

4.5.3 Professional

Webster’s defines a “professional” as “one who belongs to one of the learned professions or is in an occupation requiring a high level of training and proficiency”. In keeping with these meanings for the terms profession and professional, “women professional’ is understood as women who are members of professions like Medicine, Law, Engineering and Accounting, in this study.

4.5.4 Role Conflict

According to Katz and Kahn, (1978) Role conflict is the psychological tension that is aroused by conflicting role pressures. For the purpose of this study, role conflict is defined as the form of conflict that took place when one performed two different roles at the same time.

4.5.5 Gender Discrimination

According to WHO (2001), “Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being
male or female in a particular point in time. Gender discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms, which prevent a person from enjoying full human rights”. Any action that specifically denies opportunities, privileges, or rewards to women, on the basis of their gender is considered as gender discrimination in the present study.

4.5.6 Glass – Ceiling

According to the Encyclopedia of American History, 1970 Glass Ceiling’, is the discriminatory barrier to the advancement of women into the upper echelons of business, the professions, and government. It refers to the obstacles that prevent women from reaching the top positions. In the present study, the term ‘glass-ceiling’ implies those issues that block women from advancing to their full potential in their respective careers other than education and experience requirements.

4.6 Research Design

The present study attempts examine the domestic and career life of the women professionals and to identify the factors that lead to work-family conflict. The study also analyses the issue of ‘glass-ceiling’ among women professionals in the Kerala context and examines the strategies adopted to achieve work – life balance. Analytical research design is employed in this study since the present study intends to:

1. Test existing hypotheses based on existing knowledge or research findings regarding women in the professions.

2. Suggest the directions of cause and effect association between the dependent variable and the independent variables, and
3. Study the effects of new phenomenon like ‘glass ceiling’ in the career prospects of the respondents.

4.7 Pilot study

Pilot study was conducted to assess the feasibility of the study. It was indeed a trial run done in preparation for the final study and was instrumental in designing the research protocol, identifying and finalising the sample, and, in determining the tool of data collection.

Through discussions with the respondents, the pilot study enabled to elicit information on the perceptions of the respondents about their family and professional life, about the constraints they face and the conflicts that haunt them, and about their adjustment strategies. The pilot study also helped to identify the potential practical problems in data collection.

4.8 Pre-test

A pre-test was done to 'try out' whether the proposed tool, interview schedule, was appropriate. It helped to discard irrelevant questions and to re-word the difficult or ambiguous questions. The feedback of the respondents after pilot study helped to prepare the interview schedule and after pretest, the necessary changes and modifications were made and the interview schedule was finalized.

4.9 Universe, Sample, Sample size and method of Sampling

The universe of the present study is the women professionals in Kerala. Women professionals in three different cities in Kerala-Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode, and, four professional groups-Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers and Chartered Accountants-
constitute the sample for the study. The choice of the professions is based on the definition of ‘profession’.

The sample consists of 100 Doctors, 100 Engineers, 100 Lawyers and 50 Chartered Accountants. The number of Chartered accountants had to be reduced due to the non-availability of required number of women chartered accountants. (For e.g., among the 1059 chartered accountants registered in the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ernakulam region, only 91 are women and among them a few are now living outside Kerala). The Chartered Accountants are chosen from the directory of the ‘Institute of Chartered Accountants’ of Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode respectively. The doctors are selected from the ‘Indian Medical Association’ directory of these three cities. The engineers are chosen from the directory of the ‘Institute of Engineers’ of the respective cities. The lawyers are chosen from the directory of ‘Indian Federation of Women Lawyers - Kerala Branch’. The respondents are selected following the ‘lottery method’ of sampling as per the following criteria;

1. Age; women professionals of the age group of 25 – 55 years are chosen as the sample of the present study. 55 years is the age of retirement in the Government Sector in Kerala. Besides, by that age, children would have grown up and family roles would have become less demanding and hence women of above 55 age groups would not be prone to dual-role conflict in comparison to women below 55 years.

2. Marital status; only married women with or without children are selected as the respondents, keeping in mind, the objectives of the study.
3. **Profession.** Women of four different professions – Doctors, engineers, Advocates and Chartered Accountants-are included in the sample.

4. **Educational Qualification.** The minimum educational qualification of the respondents is ‘Undergraduate Degree’ in their respective subjects, for doctors, engineers and advocates, and FCA for the Chartered Accountants.

The sample thus comprises of professionals from various categories. Women professionals generally come from middle and upper middle class of families, where presumably the economic needs are well net and there is an emphasis on achievement. Besides, all of them hold professional qualifications to their credit and for most of them, the spouses are also professionals. All these attributes combined with the additional conditions that the sample is drawn from the state of Kerala and that it comprises of married women in the age group 25 – 55, gives it a homogeneous character in terms of the socio-economic, demographic characteristics.

**4.10 Tool of Data Collection.**

Structured Interview Schedule is the tool used in the present study. The schedule consists of 41 questions out of which majority are close-ended questions. There are a few open-ended questions also. The first part of the schedule consists of questions on the personal and family details of the respondents. Information is elicited on the type of family, orientation towards family role, arrangement regarding domestic work, the level of spouse-support, etc. The second part deals with ‘job-profile’. This includes questions on occupational designation, years of service, level of satisfaction in the profession, level of involvement in the profession etc. The third part of the
interview schedule consists of questions on the problems the respondents encounter. There are questions on role-conflict and gender discrimination. The fourth part of the schedule consists of questions on achieving work-life balance, opinions on the challenges women professionals face and reasons for the under-representation of women in top positions. Questions on their suggestions on measures that would enable women professionals to achieve work-life balance are also included.

4.11 Data Collection

Data collection was done during the months of February, March, April and May, 2006. The respondents were contacted over telephone; appointments were fixed and the respondents were met either at the work place or at home as per the pre-decided schedule. After an introduction of the topic of study and the purpose, the interview was conducted. The interview revealed in-depth data with regard to perceptions of professional women, about their work and family. They expressed their opinions on the limitations affecting women in terms of conditioned roles, fixed expectations, managing the family role with full responsibility, living in a joint family set up etc. Professionals also shared about their career goals and expectations and how their family life was being managed. The professionals talked about how they were managing their dual roles and discussed about the policies which, if, introduced which would enable women to perform better in the professional field.

4.12 Problems encountered in Data Collection.

The major problem encountered was in getting enough number of respondents. This is a study on highly educated women with professional degrees, yet, unfortunately, many declined the request for an appointment for interview. Time availability of the respondents also
proved to be a problem for the researcher. Several times, the appointment had to be cancelled and made afresh, because of unexpected delays at work or because of emergency cases. The HR policies of some companies proved problematic. Some companies discourage and even do not permit the interview of their employees. Hence a large number of companies had to be contacted to get the required number of respondents.

4.13 Data Analysis

Primary data was collected through interview schedule. The filled in schedule was edited and was subsequently coded and computer analysed. The data was then presented in tabular form, analysed and interpreted. The data has been tabulated and presented in percentages. Chi square test has been applied wherever possible and in all cases, the p-value of .05 is treated as a "border-line acceptable" error level. Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation have also been computed wherever relevant. Association of Attributes has been assessed using Kendall’s tau-b.

Based on the primary data, its analysis and interpretation, a report has been prepared and it is documented in the following chapters. Chapter 5 discusses the personal, family and work profile of the respondents, Chapter 6 examines the dual role perceptions of the women professionals, Chapter 7 deals with dual role experience, highlighting the enabling and constraining factors, Chapter 8 probes into gender issues and the consequent career prospects of women professionals, Chapter 9 dwells with the balancing acts that enable the women professionals to achieve work-life balance and Chapter 10 is the summary of the findings and conclusion. Wherever possible, the impact of background variables has been analysed and reported.