Chapter 10

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Today at the dawn of the twenty first century and the turn of the millennium, women in Kerala, have the opportunity to participate in a world – ‘the world of work’- that previously excluded them. They participate in any and every kind of jobs, tasks, roles and performance. They travel countries and continents far and wide. Organizations and firms select women from their rigorous selection process. Women have proved themselves and there are many women who play the role of leaders in the world of work in Kerala. Women today are very much capable of managing any profession regardless of all the hassles in life. They are equally talented as men and are satisfied and successful with their lifestyle. Professionalism today does not distinguish between men and women. It calls for a stance of mind and suitable motivation supported by congenial external conditions.

The genesis of the present study lay in the understanding that though more and more women are taking to ‘dual role’ in Kerala and that a few among them are excelling in their particular fields, the vocations of successful mother and professional do not allow a smooth sail. Studies disclose that the major segment of the workforce-women is struggling to balance these two most important forces in their lives. Many successful career women worry about being good wives, mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law. They carry the pangs of guilt about motherhood of a traditional society, even while living in an industrialized modern society. The winds of change have touched them in their dreams of becoming and yet they remain untouched in their social roles. So what is in store for the women of
today? What are their perceptions and experiences in their endeavors to combine family with career? What batons are they expected to uphold and project?

This research makes a modest attempt to put in perspective issues concerning what happens when women dedicate themselves to their work, that is, the impact of work on their personal, familial and social life. The focus of this study is women in the professions. Women Professionals can be considered as a distinct category in that they are highly educated and highly placed in the occupational hierarchy. Professions demand an immense commitment of time, energy and emotions, and, as such professionals are bound to develop a life style of their own, with a unique set of ideologies and values.

Women professionals in three different cities in Kerala—Thiruvananthapuram Kochi and Kozhikode and four professional groups-Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers and Chartered Accountants—constituted the sample for the study. The lottery method of random sampling was adopted. The sample size was 350 and it consisted of 100 Doctors, 100 Engineers, 100 Lawyers and 50 Chartered Accountants. Structured Interview Schedule was the tool used in the present study. The schedule consisted of 41 questions out of which mainstream questions were close-ended. There were a small number of open-ended questions also. Data collection was done during the months of 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 agenda. After an introduction of the topic of study and the purpose, the interview was conducted. The filled in schedules were edited and were subsequently coded, analyzed and interpreted using the SPSS statistical package for social science research.
The aim of the present study was to examine the perceptions of women professionals in Kerala, regarding their family and professional roles, with an understanding of the issues that they regard as enabling or constraining them in achieving family and work life balance. It attempted to find out the factors that motivate women to join the professions, the struggles they have to undergo, and, the strategies that they adopt in order to arrive at work life balance. In this chapter, the major findings are summarized.

The conceptual framework for the study is derived from the Symbolic Interaction Theory and Gender Inequality Theory. These theories are particularly significant because, each of these theories provide a unique perspective and, an answer to why women are not equal participants in the labor market. According to the theories, even though men and women are unequally placed in the occupational scenario, this inequality is not the result of any biological or psychological difference; instead, the theories advocate that, it is the existence of separate spheres of activity for men and women that has led to the inequality between men and women.

The study proceeded with the assumption that socialisation into female sex role is negatively related to women’s career achievement patterns and aspirations and the findings enable us to accept this assumption. Even though, the respondents of the study represent that segment of society which could be considered as the most unconventional in their outlook towards gender roles and value systems, the traditional role stereotypes that are transmitted through socialization are so strong and binding that no woman can desist internalizing them and enacting accordingly.
10.1 Dual Role Perceptions

In this context, the perceptions of women professionals of their dual role were examined, with an assessment through personal family and work domain variables. The first major finding of the study is that for the women professionals of Kerala, ‘Interest in the Field’ is the most significant propeller in choosing the particular profession. The data permit us to conclude that though the choice of the particular profession is determined by several factors the most important among them all is their own interest in it. This finding is contradictory to the existing assumptions and the findings of earlier studies on the factors that motivate women to work, which state that work is a special leaning assumed by women to overcome difficult situations in the family. The possible reason for the difference in this study can be attributed to the high educational and socio-economic status of the respondents and the consequent absence of any economic requirement to enhance the family income.

With regard to the dual role perceptions of the women professionals, the findings show that while most of the respondents consider family and profession as equally important, a greater number of respondents who consider family as more important than career belong to the age group 31-40. This can be attributed to the fact that for married women, family demands are maximum during the period of 31-40 years of age, and, it could be inferred that gender role expectations and responsibilities continue to be dominant for women in Kerala.

Of the several theories on the career development of women, the ‘development approach’ proposed by Bradwick (1980) is significant for this study because of its focus on the work life as well
as on the work-family interfaces. The findings of this study support the postulates of the theory. The theory postulates that there are four phases in the career life of women and even though, women start their career in all earnestness, during the first two stages, the traditional roles remain an integral part of their identity and they experience self-doubts and anxiety about their feminine roles and hence they slow down their career development, but, the third phase is different in Bradwick’s terms, ‘professional resurgence’ takes place; by this time they would have finished the job of ‘mothering’ and are free to concentrate on their career. From then on, it is a time of career accomplishments for women.

Perceptions on the relative significance of career and family roles seem to differ across different religious groups. There is difference between the responses of Christian respondents in comparison with Hindu or Muslim respondents. While 74 percent and 72.7 percent of Hindu and Muslim respondents respectively, give equal priority to both career and family, only 54.1 percent of the Christian respondents regard so. So also, when, 22.7 percent of the Hindu and 22.7 percent of the Muslim respondents deem family as more important than career, almost half, 43.2 percent of the Christian respondents give greater precedence to family. The possible reason for this is attributed to the strong dominance of patriarchal ideology among the Christians than among the other two groups.

There is no significant inter-professional differences in the value attached to family or career. The responses are equally spread and there is not much variation. Hence it could be concluded that it is not the nature of profession or age of the respondent but rather the value system imbibed through socialization that mould the perceptions of the respondents and determine the significance attached to family and
career. The fact that there is a shift in emphasis in different age groups demonstrate that women professionals cling to the age old assumptions imbibed through socialization regarding the ideal role of women and they give higher priority to family in the ‘child rearing’ stage but later in the ‘empty nest’ stage their priority to family lessens. The disparity in responses with regard to respondents of different religious groups can be ascribed to the strong hold of traditional ideas regarding the appropriate role of women in the community which is also taken in through socialization.

Abraham Maslow’s Theory of Needs is seen validated by the sample in the present study. Our findings specify that profession facilitate the satisfaction of all the needs as suggested by Maslow. The findings show that ‘achievement need’ has the highest priority. It is in fact, the need that motivates the women professionals to pursue their career. The second main concern is ‘security needs’, followed by ‘self-actualization needs’, ‘economic needs’ and lastly ‘affiliation needs’.

10.2. Job Involvement & Job satisfaction.

The analysis of the level of job involvement of the women professionals discloses that the involvement level is quite high. The results show that 34.3 percent of the women professionals are highly involved with their profession, 62.3 percent demonstrate moderate involvement and only a marginal 3.4 percent show low involvement in their respective professions.

Research studies over the past two decades which have explored the construct of job involvement have approached it from two different perspectives (Sekaran 1989). First, when viewed as an individual different variable, job involvement is believed to occur when the possession of certain needs, values, or personal
characteristics predispose individuals to become more or less involved in their jobs. The second perspective views job involvement as a response to specific work situation characteristics. In other words, certain types of jobs or characteristics of the work situation influence the degree to which an individual becomes involved in his/her job.

In this study, it is found that job involvement is not associated with any of the personal domain variables. The findings suggest that the passion for the professional activities is independent of one’s personal attributes. It is however found that women professionals with longer years of service have higher job involvement in comparison with those whose years of service are less. The findings also indicate the positive association between family and spouse support in enhancing the level of job involvement.

Regarding job satisfaction, the findings indicate that 31.4 percent of the professionals experience a high level of job satisfaction. 65.1 percent of the respondents are moderately satisfied, and a marginal 2.3 percent is either unsatisfied or highly unsatisfied. Summing up, it is seen that more than 90 percent of the respondents perceive their professions to be satisfying. On inquiry of the level of association between job satisfaction and the different variables, the following conclusions are drawn. Among the personal domain variables, job satisfaction is positively and significantly associated with age of the respondents. It is seen that the respondents of higher age groups have higher levels of job satisfaction in comparison with the others. Job satisfaction shows a positive association with all the family domain variables. Among the work domain variables years of service, work schedule as well as the number of hours of work per day, of the respondents is associated with the level of their job satisfaction.
10.3 Dual Role Experience

To get an insight into the respondents’ dual role performance their self – evaluation on the extent of difficulty experienced in combining family and career is assessed. The responses are not similar. It is found that for 4.3 percent of the respondents, combining family and career is very easy, and for 58.9 percent, it is easy. On the contrary, for 28 percent of the respondents the task of combining family and career prove to be difficult and 1.1 percent find it to be very difficult. 7.7 percent of the respondents could not say whether it is easy or difficult, for them, the ease or difficulty in combining family and career is not the same throughout the year. An attempt is made in this study to examine the factors that facilitate and constrain the dual role performance of the women professionals of Kerala. The data show that ‘spouse–support’ is the most essential element in the dual role performance of the women and hence the hypothesis that spouse–support is negatively associated with dual role conflict is accepted. Nature of the work schedule is the second facilitator of dual role performance. Absence of small children is ranked as the third factor that makes dual role performance easy.

The data reveal that lack of time is the greatest problem for women professionals in their dual role performance. Having to combine a paid job with rearing children, keeping up with hobbies and coping with domestic tasks result in many women professionals feeling frustrated due to a lack of time. Being too busy to do things well can also give rise to a sense of dissatisfaction.

This is supported by the findings of previous studies that time allocation is the gravest problem for women professionals. It has been established that workingwomen face heavy workload due to their
household responsibilities and job related responsibilities. (Rani 1971). In his doctoral thesis, titled “Impact of time pressure on Lifestyles” Maarten Moens(2001), a sociologist of the Free University of Brussels., investigated job-related and other factors that cause people to experience time pressure. One of his conclusions is that professional and managerial staff experience greater feelings of time pressure than other occupational groups.

The respondents also experience ‘Work Overload’ and ‘Pressures associated with Home Management’ as affecting their dual role performance negatively. This highlights the intricacy and encircling nature of family and work for women professionals. The demands of the homebound duties and the perceptions associated with the home role put rigorous tension and pressure on the workingwomen, making dual role performance tough.

“We are just working, working, working, and working”, was the response of a respondent when she was asked to explain the work pressure as she experienced it. This comment captures how women professionals perceive the sometimes crushing workload of the profession. The resulting exhaustion and stress are left unstated, but they are obviously part of the dual role. Work overload was so common that it was ranked as the second factor that makes dual role performance difficult.

10.4. Support Systems

The study also assessed the various support systems that enable dual role performance and tried to unfold the nature and dynamics of spouse- support. The results reveal that the respondents’ appraisal of family support in general is very high. The analysis demonstrate that 45.6 percent of the respondents have a high score of family support,
49.4 percent have a medium score and only a meager 4.9 percent have low family support. The findings prove that 95.1 percent of the respondents receive generous family support, which in turn facilitate their dual role performance and lessen the role conflicts associated with the same.

Spouse-support is assessed on three levels, overall or general spouse support, work related spouse support and family related spouse support. The findings bring out that most of the professional women receive high work related support from their spouses, which extends from discussing career related problems, receiving encouragement to take advantage of professional opportunities, and, in extending support in solving career related problems. Amongst all these forms of support, discussing career related problems and encouraging to take advantage of professional opportunities are more common. This finding is supported by other studies suggesting that listening and acting as sounding board is the most frequently acknowledged support by the husband (Hunt and Hunt 1977 and Pleck 1977).

Another aspect of husband’s support is the support extended by him in the management of routine household tasks or the division of labour within the household. This is particularly significant, since for the full time employed professional woman taking care of daily household and childcare responsibilities, in roles of wife and mother may be particularly unwieldy, and a source of additional strain. The findings of this study indicate that the respondents do not get family related support of their spouses as expected. 80.8 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the husbands do not look after the affairs of the family when they were busy at work.
Apart from the work related areas, the general attitude displayed by husband in considering the wife’s career as equally important as that of his is also found to be quite high in this study. Most of the professionals mentioned that they can talk about things that were important to them, can depend on their husbands support and encouragement when they need them and rely upon him for most of the career-related problems that need to be taken care of. Nearly all the professionals consider their spouses to be respecting their professional accomplishments. The findings were supported by the previous studies which suggest that husbands of professional women were more likely to respect competence and achievement in women (Rapoport and Rapoport 1971). It is seen that the support extended in areas such as housekeeping and reacting positively is low. The practical help extended in household chores is available to a still lesser extent. However, discussing work-related issues is found to be a common feature among professional couples. This leads to the conclusion that the foremost need of professionals is for seeking opinions and clarification on work related issues, which is very readily available by virtue of the spouse himself being in the same or another profession and that might be the reason why the professionals claim that they are happy with the extent of spouse support that they receive.

It can be inferred that in Kerala the performance of household duties is still gender-wise. In general, childcare and looking after the affairs of the family are still considered the duty of women. The results support the findings of Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) and Paloma (1972) that in dual career families there were only slight changes in household task performance and the responsibility for it remains with the wife. The findings of this study disclose a similar
fact. It is found that even though, the work-related spouse-support is quite high, the family-related spouse support is low. The reason for the low family -related spouse support can be attributed to the availability of paid help and the accessibility of the support of parents or parents-in-law, coupled with the notion that household tasks are basically female tasks.

10.5. Work - Family Conflict

Although there are several studies on role conflict and on its antecedents and consequences, among workingwomen in general, little is known about this stressor as it manifests itself among highly educated and highly placed women professionals. Therefore, an attempt is made in this study to examine the pattern and the magnitude of role conflict among the women professionals in Kerala. We also seek to expand on earlier research by identifying additional antecedents of role conflict among this section of working women.

Even though an ever-increasing number of women are taking to dual roles, it is said that combining a full time career with a full time family responsibilities is not a smooth sail. Analysis of the type of role underplayed or sacrificed by professional women revealed that 69.7 percent professionals felt that they are not underplaying one role or ignoring the expectations of one of the roles while performing another role. Among the rest, the largest number of professionals considers that they are underplaying both the roles. Still less number of professionals considers that they are underplaying the family roles whereas the least number of professionals consider that they are underplaying the work role. The implication of these finding is that only few professionals need to curtail on either of the roles at a given point of time, due to the dual role demands placed on them. This
finding is in sharp contrast to the findings of Arora (2003). In her study on professional women in India, she found that sixty five percent professionals in her sample felt that they were underplaying one role or ignoring the expectations of one of the roles while performing another role. The credit for the different finding in this study can be attributed to the strong support systems that the women professionals of Kerala have. It also proves the popular contention that though families in Kerala are turning structurally nuclear, they remain functionally joint.

The findings of the study enable the researcher to argue that both the nature and predictors of role conflict as experienced by women professionals may differ from those experienced by other sections of working women. The results of this study indicate that while work domain characteristics having the potential to exacerbate incongruencies between personal competence and job demands may effect the level of role conflict experienced by working women in general, these same issues may do little in explaining the level of role conflict experienced by women professionals. The implications of the findings of this study lead to a broad conclusion in relation to the reasons for work family conflict among women professionals. It is seen that the main problems emanate from the combination of family and career among women professionals. For them the conflicts originate from the patriarchal ideology of our society, where the demands of the husband, children and family receive priority. Sociologically, the demands work and family systems place are incompatible and consequently women professionals find them in a conflicting situation.

The dilemma of work and family can be serious for women professionals as they are responsible for the success of their own
career and the welfare of their family. As a working wife and mother, married women professionals have to assume multiple roles both in relation to family and profession. Often this results in work-family conflict because they have to manage both work and family roles simultaneously. Research studies report that they have to bear major responsibility for household chores and childcare (Loscocco and Leicht 1993). These domestic responsibilities have made the process of professional accomplishment more difficult for women professionals.

This study aims to contribute to the current level of knowledge of the women professionals in Kerala, by gaining an understanding of the ways these women struggle to reconcile work dedication with their commitment to family. The focus of the study is to find out what happens when women dedicate themselves to work, when they are inspired by their profession and are interested in their professional successes along with the domestic roles. Professions demand an immense amount of commitment, time, energy and emotion. So does the family. The tug-of-war between family and profession lead many women to role conflict.

Role conflict is examined from two perspectives, one, that emanates from the interference of profession on family which is labeled as “work to family conflict” and two, that which arise from the interference of family on profession labeled as “family to work conflict”. The level of work to family conflict of the women professionals is examined in this study by relying on the self-valuation of the extent to which the respondents’ professional lives interfered with their family lives. Hypotheses were generated to test the association between Career orientation, Job involvement, Family support and Spouse support. The analysis of the relationship with work-family conflict and these variables using chi-square test reveal
that the level of career orientation, job involvement, spouse support and family support affect the degree of work to family conflict. It could be concluded that women professionals who are more oriented and involved in their professions at the career front and those who lack spouse and family support at the domestic front are more prone to conflict. Although these conflicts may seem like personal struggles, we find that they are rooted in powerful societal assumptions about what makes life worthwhile. Hence it is concluded that conflict between work and family arise due to the contradiction between societal understandings of who, one is and what one should be doing.

Following current literature, we emphasize the distinction between work interfering with family and family interfering with work. It is further postulated that these two dimensions of work-family conflict are determined by similar as well as different factors. Our results basically confirm the conceptual distinction of these two types of conflicts. The level of family to work conflict is assessed on the basis of findings of the self-valuation of the extent of interfacing of family in the work lives of the women professionals. Hypotheses were also made to test the association between the family domain variables and family to work conflict. The analysis of their relationship using chi-square test reveals that the level of family to work conflict is dependant on all the family domain variables. In addition, it has been found that the family-related factors and job-related factors are important predictors of work to family conflict. The job-related factors are seen to have effects on family interference with work, whereas the ages of children, type of family, Similarly, family support and spouse support are seen to have very significant effects on women professionals’ family interference with work. This result highlights the
impact of gender division of labor in the household upon work-family conflict as experienced by women professionals.

Further, comparison between the levels of work to family conflict and family to work conflict reveal that though conflict is pervasive in both the domains, the work domain is a slightly greater source of conflict than the family domain. So the hypotheses, “family domain is a greater source of conflict than work domain”, is rejected and the alternate hypothesis that “work domain is a greater source of conflict than family domain”, is accepted.

The implications of these findings lead to a broad conclusion with respect to the issue of role conflict among women professionals. It can be affirmed that the main struggles emanating from dual role participation of women originate in the patriarchal ideology of our society, where the demands of the family are thought to be the first and prime concern of women. Hence it can be concluded that work-family issues are fundamentally rooted in the shared and powerful socio-cultural understandings, which are transmitted through the processes of socialization. Therefore, to confront work-family conflict is to struggle with profound issues of commitments and social and individual identity, as shaped by the culture and communities in which one is a member. As Sharma et al (1984) explain, patriarchal ideology, is the chief instrument of women’s oppression within the family and women too internalize these ideology and accept the related practices through the process of socialisation.

10.6. Gender Discrimination

Apart from the issues related to role conflict, another universal concern that haunts women in the professions is the question of gender equity. Drastic increase in the number of workingwomen has
thrust this issue to the workplace forefront. Gender discrimination is prevalent and appears to be exacerbated by the perplexing responsibilities of workingwomen attempting to balance family life and professional career. It is a fact that the constitution of India ensures gender equality in its preamble as Fundamental Right and also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women by way of legislation and policies. However it is believed that there exist a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation policies, plans, programmes and the reality with regard to the situation of women in India.

Despite legislative enactments assuring equality for Indian women along with men, there are discriminatory customs and traditions which undermine the legislative gains extended to women. The present study discloses that despite their increased participation, women do not have equal access to the different levels of occupational hierarchies. They are under represented in higher level jobs- higher rungs remain male dominated. It is therefore not surprising that women’s participation in professions is also socially determined Of course there are areas where women’s lives have changed, particularly education, which has enabled the participation of women in the professions. In addition, our leaders, both men and women have always campaigned for doing away the traditions and practices that prescribe subordinate status to women. Yet the study proves that in a multitude of ways, women’s lives are limited by the prescriptions of the society.

This study discloses that the gender stereotypes that continue to plague women are situated in the context of all professions. Doctors, engineers, Advocates and, Chartered accountants, testify to the continuing existence of problems typically thought long conquered,
such as male-only executive teams and management committees; and firms hesitant to hire women for fear that they might leave the firm to start a family. The findings reveal that women in all professions are still struggling with persistent stereotypes governing sexuality, competence, ambition, personal style, leadership, and, motherhood.

This study also examines the sexist work experiences of the women professionals. Specifically, it focused on reports of discrimination, gender disparagement, and sexual harassment as components of gendered systems that maintain and reinforce inequalities between men and women on the job. Respondents report lower levels of discrimination at the more visible and legally protected "front door" (in recruitment and hiring) than on the job (in salary, promotion, and pay raises).

The findings thus reveal that gender discrimination is a reality in the professional world in contemporary Kerala. The analysis of gender equality scores indicates that women professionals experience gender inequality to varying extent. It is observed that 5.1 percent of the respondents experience high, 74.3 percent see moderate, 17.1 percent recognized low level of inequality of women professionals and for 3.4 percent of the respondents, inequality experienced is nil in comparison with men.

An issue of special concern to workingwomen is the prevalence of sexual harassment at workplace and hence it is dealt separately. As the participation of women in the labourforce has increased, the incidence of harassment has also correspondingly increased, is the popular assumption and the argument of several studies. To comprehend the situation in Kerala, this study examined women professionals’ experience of sexual harassment in their particular
profession. The findings indicate that sexual harassment at workplace is not as widespread among professional women in Kerala as it may be elsewhere. 93.7% of the respondents opposed the statement that women are subjected to sexual harassment in their professions. It is argued that it is the high educational status of the professionals that has made them see each other as equals, as individuals regardless of their sex and has brought about such a situation.

This study also attempted to find out whether ‘glass ceiling’ reflect in the experiences of the women professionals. The study discloses that there exists invisible ceiling called ‘glass ceiling’, the many different kinds of social and cultural barriers that prevent women professionals from performing well and from advancing to top positions. The results indicate that 55.8 percent of the respondents have the feeling that the prevalence of gender stereotypes which act as barriers and deny the women professionals due appreciation and ruin their career prospects. Thus it can be concluded that gender proves to be an inflexible barrier in the career advancement of the women professionals and lead to their prejudicial treatment and discrimination at work thus denying them fairness and impartiality in the professional opportunity structure. This led us to accept the hypotheses that “glass ceiling’ block the career prospects of women professionals” and that “the paucity of women in top positions in the professions is the result of both social constraints and of discriminations at work place”.

The root causes for these barriers as well as prejudices and cultural biases, can be traced to societal expectations and the consequent processes of social conditioning. There are various aspects of socialisation, one among them being the division of labour by gender, which reinforces the subordinate status of women.
Everywhere societies divide tasks between men and women. Two tasks that fall into the women’s lot everywhere are the nourishment of newborn infants and food preparation. In the ideology of separate spheres, the gender based division of labor in most cases make domestic roles the primary careers of women; extending personal services to the husband and care for the needs and proper socialisation of next generation. It has been observed that women have usually been socialized to view the attainment of this goal as an ideal.

Further, gender socialisation affects the aspirations, motivations and attitudes of women towards work. Most women adopt the policy of ‘compromise on career growth’ to achieve equilibrium between family and career, knowing that they will lose their chance to go up in their career and that they will earn less. Sociologist Carol Ireson (1978) noted that two thirds of all job categories were still virtually closed to women. Family work and adult work patterns all convey the idea that women should be subordinate to and dependent on men. The findings of this study prove that these traditional views have great power over women’s lives.

Thus, despite legislative enactments assuring equality for Indian women along with men, there are discriminatory customs and traditions which undermine the legislative gains extended to women. Studies show that despite their increased participation, women do not have equal access to the different levels of occupational hierarchies. They are under represented in higher level jobs- higher rungs remain male dominated. Studies on occupational segregation of women disclose that a large number of women can still be found in occupations that are in agreement with the socially prescribed roles of women. It is therefore not surprising that women’s participation in
professions is also socially determined. Of course, there are areas where women’s lives have changed, particularly education, which has enabled the participation of women in the professions. In addition, our leaders, both men and women, have always campaigned for doing away with traditions and practices that prescribe subordinate status to women. Yes, the study proves that in a multitude of ways, women’s lives are limited by the prescriptions of the society.

10.7 Compromise Strategies

The choice of women who opt for a career along with gender roles ascribed to them as caregivers is found to lead to compromise strategies. The decision to be with the family might preclude taking a promotion that could lead to career growth. Similarly, enabling the career advancement of one’s spouse would mean slowing down the career path of the self. In other words, women often curtail their career aspirations for the sake of their families.

Today’s career women are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work and when the day’s work is done at the office, they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments at home. Often working women report that their lives are a juggling act that includes multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. Undeniably, all women go through the torture of balancing their work and family lives. Even though work-life balance is an issue for men too, it seems to assail women the most. Even with a spouse and family to support them, the conflicts between work and family do not resolve. More often than not, this drains the women both emotionally and physically. This topic has gained significance today in comparison with the past, because in the
past, women often were able to attend primarily to one major role only in their life rather than to several, which is typical of today. Hence this study attempts to examine the strategies adopted by women professionals for achieving work-life balance.

The challenges facing women who choose between demanding careers and family lives has been the subject of many studies and most of them propose strategies for resolving the dilemma. This study is different in that focuses on broader social and cultural forces that create women's identities and shape their understanding of what makes life worth living. The present study examined the career paths of women professionals who have tried various approaches to balancing career and family. The professional level these women have attained requires a huge commitment of time, energy, and emotion that seems natural to employers and clients, who assume that a career deserves single-minded allegiance. Meanwhile, these women must confront the cultural model of family that defines marriage and motherhood as a woman's primary vocation. This ideal promises women creativity, intimacy, and financial stability in caring for a family. It defines children as fragile and assumes that men lack the selflessness and patience that children's primary caregivers need. This ideal is taken for granted even in contemporary societies. The study discloses that the respondents’ attempts to arrive at work-life balance are based on the development of conscious and deliberate strategies of adjustment. Separate strategies are resorted to meet the demands of career on family and those of family on career. Compromise on career growth is the most frequent and the most common strategy adopted, followed by placing limits on work-time and resorting to informal work accommodation. From this, it is argued that the women professionals uphold the patriarchal views about gender roles.
Consequently, they refrain from giving up any of their domestic duties and make adjustments in the career so that their work does not affect their home roles.

Similarly, in order to accomplish dual role balance, the women professionals may resort to several other strategies to meet the demands of Family on Career leaving domestic chores and childcare to paid help. Compromise on social activities and compromise on hobbies are the almost universal coping strategies reported by the women professionals. These coping strategies entail several things. First, the influence of patriarchal ideology which lies latent become manifest when the women professionals opt to leave the domestic chores and child care to paid help. In other words, by this adjustment, they refrain from shifting any of their responsibilities to their husbands and prefer to get the services of housemaids. Second, their willingness to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the family and its harmony becomes evident. The fear of their inability to meet the role expectations of others pushes them to give up or at least curtail personal hobbies and social commitments.

The topic of work-life balance applies to a person's effort to be effective in their work life and in their personal life, as well. This topic was not as important in the past as it is today because, in the past, people often were able to attend primarily to one major role in their life (example, working, housework, etc.), rather than to several (example, to a career, being a mother, being happy as an individual, etc). Organizations are recognizing that, to cultivate and support effective employees, the organization must assist employees to learn how to achieve and maintain suitable work-life balance. Thus, realizing the current significance of the issue of work-life balance, the
study sets out to investigate the balancing acts of the women professionals.

This study on women professionals reveal that they are unwilling to relinquish either of their roles, instead, for a viable functioning they resort to coping strategies which are nothing but adjustments that safeguard the interests of the family while enabling their participation in workforce. Hence it is argued that work-life balance hinges on the societal definition of what makes life meaningful and worthwhile. Societal understandings shape our perception of what we owe to our families, to our careers and ourselves. Moreover, these societal norms have real consequences for peoples’ lives; for they help define the expectations of employers, clients, and spouses. Social norms thus shape careers; they open and close off opportunities and they influence couple’s decision about who is to advance in career and who is to lag behind.

10.8. Limitations of the Study

The small size of the sample seems to be a drawback of the study. With information from 350 respondents, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Time pressure of the respondents often curtailed or prevented deeper probe into the details of their problems, or of the coping strategies adopted by them. To a certain extent, this is a one-sided version of the story, since the perceptions and experiences of spouses, parents and employers are not taken into accountant. Besides, this study is conducted on a single time period. If data is collected longitudinally a better understanding of how changes in family structure and demands affect work over a period of time would have become clearer and the findings would have been more authentic.
Moreover, the current study is primarily based on quantitative data which provides a good test of basic constructs and relationships among different variables. The study reveals that structured interview schedules cannot fully yield information on the various aspects of dual role perception and experience. Hence a qualitative study of women professionals however, might provide additional insight for understanding work-family conflict among them.

It is also possible to examine the three forms of work-family conflict in depth. For example, it is seen that time-based conflict is assumed to be associated with job-related factors, and strain- and behavior-based conflict are related to both family and paid employment. How these factors are related to each other and to what extent each, affects work interference with family and family interference with work is worth further investigation.

10.9. Policy Implications.

In view of the existing scenario of women in the professions, a number of relevant issues must be considered in formulating and implementing appropriate strategies for making work places better for women professionals. The study discloses that there exist many different kinds of social and cultural barriers that prevent women professionals from performing well and from advancing to top positions. There is no doubt that the so called ‘glass-ceiling’ is a reality in Kerala. The root causes for these barriers as well as prejudices and cultural biases against women should be identified and must be done away with.

Conflict between work and family must be overcome. The increased participation of women in the professions has resulted in potential conflict between the family and work related responsibilities
thereby creating new challenges in the areas of child and elderly care. To alleviate the conflict between work and family domains, companies must be urged to develop work-family programs and policies that aim at enhancing job flexibility and releasing domestic burdens of professional women. A job-related factor that has drawn increasing research attention recently in reducing role conflict is job flexibility. Job flexibility reflects the autonomy and/or control one has regarding time schedule and work location. It is suggested that high flexibility at work facilitates job-family compatibility and thus reduces work-family conflict. On-site daycare, for example, may also prove to be an effective means to increase female employees’ job satisfaction and commitment, improve work climate, as well as reduce staff turnover. In this sense, organizations can play a key role in reducing work-family conflict of women professionals by introducing direct supportive practices.

Because the traditional gender roles place higher priority on domestic obligations for women, factors associated with family life that are likely to exert greater influence on women’s attitudes and behaviors must be changed. A new social climate must be created, emphasizing sharing of household tasks by all members of the family—men, women, boys and girls.

Merely having more women in the professions will not end inequality between men and women. It is important to see that integration of women in the workforce goes beyond tokenism and that women are treated as equal partners in the work force. Factors enhancing and facilitating the career advancement opportunities of women must be encouraged. This means that ensuring an equal opportunity work place may require consciously taking gender into account in job assignments and promotions. This could take the form
of gender conscious recruiting, such as targeting traditionally female labor pools or proactively identifying women who are likely candidates for advancement; or gender-conscious hiring which explicitly treats “being a woman” as a “plus factor” in deciding among qualified applicants.

Occupational segregation must be done away with. Creative ideas must be sought and polices adopted to promote non-segregation of women in all sectors as well as to crack the so-called glass ceiling to come out and move forward the occupational hierarchy.

It must be ensured that persons conduct themselves appropriately and that sexual harassment is not perpetrated against any employee. The prevailing organizational climate in Kerala in this regard must be encouraged and perpetuated in order to allow equity-based partnership among male and female employees in the workforce.

For workingwomen, getting caught in the work-life balance trap will continue to be an ongoing challenge. But, careful planning and personal effort will enable one to achieve equilibrium between the twin roles. As one respondent summarized, "Plan, prioritize and schedule as efficiently as possible…don't be afraid of hard work; and work-life balance would be yours”

In short, this study aimed to explore the perceptions of women professionals in Kerala, regarding their family and professional roles, with an understanding of the issues that they regard as enabling or constraining them in achieving family and work-life balance. The findings disclose that women professionals are highly motivated in their careers, that profession provides the satisfaction of their various needs, that there are several facilitating and constraining factors in dual role performance
and that dual role bring with it the issue of role conflict among women professionals. The study also unveils the presence of glass ceiling that deny the women professionals their rightful place in the occupational hierarchy. The coping strategies surrounding dual role is also disclosed. The researcher does not claim that the study is all encompassive. However, it is believed that in a modest way, the findings of this study shall prove useful for future research on women professionals.