Chapter 4

Work Life Balance

(In this chapter I present the findings drawn from the interviewee responses, supported by the verbatim quotes of the interviewees, and the statistical analysis of the responses to the questionnaire regarding work life issues. The work life issues include the factors which define context, the organizational and social setting in which the work life issues are faced, the conflicts and the coping strategies used to handle work life conflicts. Layder’s Model will be used as a framework to present the findings. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.)

4.1 Introduction

Work life balance is the Gordian knot for working women. The ability to balance work pressures, home demands and social expectations is not easily acquired and often becomes an insidious and effective barrier to career women. It forces them to either compromise on their career ambitions or dilutes their role in the home front (Buddhapriya, 2009). Underlying this are social and cultural expectations that determine and shape their value systems, their goals, and their agency. Within the structural frame of social and cultural norms, women assert their agency. The interaction between these structures and the responses of women executives is the focus of this analysis. The aims of this study with regards to work life balance are presented in the form of research questions in
Chapter 1 under Section 1.3.3. They are recollected here in brief to facilitate the presentation and analysis of the findings from interviews and survey regarding work life issues of women executives in India.

4.2 Research Questions

One of the main objectives of this study is to determine the ways in which executive women in India achieve work life balance. The research questions posed to explore this objective are-

1. What economic, cultural and social factors define the context of women executives in India?

2. What is the nature of influence that familial, social, and professional factors have on women executives’ career and personal life?

3. What conflicts do work and home pose for women executives?

4. How do they cope with such conflicts?

5. What does agency imply for women executives, in terms of their self?

6. What are the implications of such agency on their society?

4.3 Research Methodology Used to Analyze Work Life Balance

The qualitative analysis of the interviews and the quantitative analysis of data drawn through the questionnaire are triangulated and analyzed using Layder’s model as a framework to understand the context, and the components of the research problem. Later, in the 6th Chapter, Bourdieu’s theory, and McNay’s Performative agency theory are used to discuss agency in handling work life conflicts. They are adapted in this study to analyze the underlying structures, which trigger the work life balance conflicts and the actions of women executives
which challenge the very same structures. Both the models are in consonance with the critical realist school of thought. Women executives in India too face many economic, socio-cultural and political constraints within which, they redefine their identity and role. They resist some of these structural constraints and reinforce some of them. This leads to a unique self understanding that is specific to their social circumstance and mind set. The agency-structure theory is both historical and dynamic and hence provides a better explanation of the evolving characteristic of role definitions and the coping strategies of women executives in India. The Layder’s model is used to provide the framework for data presentation and analysis. The four components of this model - context, setting, situated activity, and self are discussed in terms of work life balance of women executives. This format of analysis is given in figure 4.1.
4.4 Context

The context refers to macro factors, which influence work life balance. The work life conflict occurs in the context of the socio-cultural history and the economic reality, which indirectly influence the way in which these conflicts are perceived and dealt with. The Structuration theory calls it the ‘field’ with in which, the actors define themselves. The ‘field’ of women executives consists of all the economic, social and cultural factors that affect them. Increased educational and employment opportunities have increased the agency of women and have altered their situation. The confluence of socio-cultural attitudes and the need for agency create a unique context for women executives.

4.4.1 Globalization

Paven Malhotra, the editor-in-chief of The Harvard International Review observes that India is in a state of metamorphosis. The liberalization waves of the 1990s, the openness to the west, and sustained economic growth, have changed the old order of things (Malhotra, 2001). Modern Indian society is a mix of realities. The Woman is worshipped as a goddess but the patriarchal outlook, which is deeply entrenched creates barriers; traditional values dominate but rapid westernization undermines them in certain pockets of society (Jain, 2010). Though liberalization has created opportunities, gender stereotyping and other barriers retard the growth of women executives (Budhwar et al., 2005).

The global gender gap report of 2012 classifies India on position 105 in a study of 135 countries. The gender gap was measured on the criteria of economic participation (123rd position), educational attainment (121th position), health and survival (134th position) and political empowerment (17th position). The emerging economy, not only affords many opportunities, but also changes social perceptions regarding her role in society, both of which can be to her advantage (Budhwar et al., 2005). Interestingly, the paradoxical situation itself can be a redeeming factor. The contrast between her social realities stimulates the need for change, and the ambiguity of her position allows her to redefine her-
self without too much deference to the repressive images of her past (Bumiller, 1991).

4.4.2 Education and Employment

M. B. M. Gupta Sarita; Shah (1982) conducted research in testing impact of education on the socio economic status of women, it was found that education changes attitudes of women. It creates a favourable attitude towards women’s equality. Women begin to question social norms and patriarchal attitudes and seek liberation. As they become conscious of their power, they begin to enter into different fields of public activity (M. B. M. Gupta Sarita; Shah, 1982). The emphasis on tertiary education and the increase in employment of women after the structural changes in the economy have created opportunities of equal access in the formal sector (Bhaumik, 2008). However, India’s economic, social and cultural diversity creates different social realities for different sections of women. Consequently, there are cultural and sub-cultural variations in the Indian society with regard to access to resources and the definition of success and achievement. Urban educated women define themselves differently from their rural counterparts. In a study of achievements, goals and means in the north of India, Agarwal and Misra (1986) found that the urban population had more differentiated sense of independence than the rural population which was more oriented towards social approval. Also the urban group differentiated between personal and family success whereas the rural group considered these to be more interdependent. Education and employment are structural factors that contribute to agency. Education changes attitudes in the long run (M. B. M. Gupta Sarita; Shah, 1982).

A study of gender and gender role identity as a determinant of attitudes towards women concludes that the gender effect is stronger than the sociopsychological variable of gender identity. The presence of masculine qualities in women and feminine qualities in men appeared to be associated with more egalitarian attitudes (Diwan & Menezes, 1992). Employment improves role efficacy
and emotional intelligence. Jyothi and Jyothi (2012) found that career women discharge and understand their role effectively. Career women also have higher levels of emotional intelligence. They also found that as the career women become efficient in managing their own emotions and those of others with whom they interact in their organizational lives, they are more empowered by their ability to give and receive. Thus role efficacy in turn has an impact on emotional intelligence. In a study examining marital adjustment and well-being of working women vis-a-vis housewives, it is found that working women reported greater level of marital adjustment and wellbeing in terms of personal and social self-esteem, health and life satisfaction. The dissatisfaction of housewives is precipitated by the belief that housework is routine, repetitive, heavy and dirty. They felt they had to deal more with things and less with people. In contrast, a working woman’s role is seen to provide opportunities for personal growth and financial benefits (Nathawat & Mathur, 1993).

Most studies quote that Indian women view family responsibilities as a deterrent to career aspirations (Sundari & Sathyanarayana, 2012; Wesley, Muthuswamy, & Darling, 2009). However, Tiwari, Jha, and Majitar (2011) in their study of gender differences in familial and work responsibilities of professional Indians found that there were differences among men and women in terms of their beliefs about familial and work responsibilities. Women believe that their commitment to professional work is not reduced because of family responsibilities but organizations must understand their familial responsibilities and respect it. They felt that commitment must not be measured by hours of work, travel willingness or number of career enhancement programmes attended. This need to be seen in their own terms is indeed agency. Women make up 42 percent of college graduates in India, yet most of them abandon careers to care for children, spouse or parents. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, president of the Centre for Work-Life Policy lead a study in 2010. It was on challenges that the Indian women encounter at the workplace. She says, “The measures of daughterly guilt are much higher in Indian women than in the West. And since taking care of elderly parents usually becomes a reality later in their careers, it takes them out of the workplace
just when they should be entering management roles. In fact, gender disparities at Indian companies grow more pronounced in management’s upper ranks.” (Srivastava, 2011). At the middle level of career, the pressure for conforming to the societal norms could be greater than that at the top level of the organization, and this lessens the pool of women who are likely to make it to the top (Buddhapriya, 2009).

Jain (2010) in their exploratory study about glass ceiling in Indian organizations unearthed some interesting findings about the psycho-social behaviour of women managers. They found that women believed that a glass ceiling exists but when asked if they had any personal experience of it, they answered in the negative. The authors conclude that Indian women are averse to accept an experience at the individual level but they do admit it at a general level. This is attributed to the upbringing and indoctrination of a girl in India, where acceptance and adjustment are reinforced. What is important to note is that this compliance is enforced not as a punitive measure but with the reasoning that the ground realities of an Indian woman’s life in marriage or in society require adjustment. Thus a ‘good girl’ must adjust for the happiness of her family and herself. This cultural legacy prevents overt rebelliousness and increases acceptability. Shanker (2008) observes that the patterns of upbringing affect leadership traits and that woman must be trained from childhood to become confident and eliminate their feelings of insecurity. Buddhapriya (2009) says that women are expected to sacrifice their careers in the interest of the family and if they do not do so they meet with social disapproval. Budhwar et al. (2005) discovered that to handle stress, women tend to reschedule their job hours but assume major responsibility on the home front. This shows how Indian women believe that their familial responsibilities are more important than their career. Singh (1994) believes that women in management need to assert themselves, they need to be less approval dependent. At the home they need to get rid of the ‘perfection syndrome’, which deters an effective work life balance.
CHAPTER 4. WORK LIFE BALANCE

4.4.3 Qualitative Findings

The respondents report strong affinity to socio cultural values. Predominant among them is the belief that family is the first priority in life. Socio religious beliefs also appear in the narrative regarding their understanding of their roles. Since cultural beliefs shape societal values and personal values, their opinions regarding, joint families, marriage, motherhood and their role definitions are presented below.

Beliefs about the Joint-Family System

A unique facet of the Indian social fabric is the joint family system wherein families consist of the parents, their siblings, children and grandparents who live together. This system not only provides a platform for value and culture transfer to the next generation but also ensures that a safe support system is created for the working woman. However the growth of nuclear families, this support system is vanishing. Women executives endorse the benefit of this system while expressing the reservations they have about it.

(58- “Honestly I am a firm believer of well, not joint families but at least a form of it- like for example my mom lives with me and I think that makes a huge difference. If I was in a nuclear family with a maid, she will physically take care of my child but the emotional well-being, the sense of belonging...is what the family alone can provide. I know that my friends’ kids who don’t have their parents living with them can do, my daughter can never think of doing those things because my mother is there. Simple stuff- like what television show she is watching, she knows the grandmother is there, and mom said not to watch this.... I keep telling these young girls in my office –‘be nice to your in-laws, they are the only ones who will take emotional care of your child if you want to work. The amount you will get in return in terms of the cheer because of the emotional well being of your children... I don’t think it can be compared to anything else’. And it doesn’t matter whether it is parents or in-laws, it is the same thing.”)

(26- “The joint family system really was a great deal of help during the times in which I started my career. It was about 30 years back”). (42- “The joint family supported me. It was a much needed support.”)

(81- “I have my in-laws at home who take care of my family. I also have a fulltime maid staying at home. My daughter is 7 years and son is 5 years old. Till my daughter was three and a half years, I was in the US, so I had left her in the daycare. When she was sick I couldn’t leave her in the daycare so I had to rely on my friends to take care of her! Back then, I managed somehow. It was much tougher there because family support was not there, but here I know that my in-laws are there, and my mother too is there.”)

Women executives also comment about the otherside of joint family system. The conflicts that arise because of differences in the way of thinking between generations, lifestyle, and money issues. (34- “When it is about extended families I think there are pressures that they face - one is about the house, it is not good enough or clean enough, and the other is that the children are not brought up in the manner that the grandparents desire, and the other issues hinge around money, because a lot of people are not comfortable sharing the salaries they earn.”)

Cultural Beliefs About Family

Women executives admit that their family continues to remain their first priority. (05- “Indians still have that support system, the family system and that’s where it helps lots of women.”) They recognize that the support they receive from their families need to be reciprocated to the next generation too. This need to propagate family values is expressed by women executives. (33- “Whatever sacrifices my mother-in-law is now making in life while she is looking after my baby, I foresee the same situation when my son gets a baby, and I will have to repeat the same for him. They (the next generation) are going to be very hard pressed in life. They will be much more stressed as compared to us. I will obviously take a cue from my family. When there is a call from your family...
Women executives believe that family time and interaction sows seeds for future families and hence they are important. (58- "Also the importance of family values gets embedded somewhere . . . Despite pressure to stay or party at work, I am at home at 9:15 or 9:30 whatever it is, I am not going partying, so my child sees that and she knows that the moment her Mama completes work she will come home and she will be with her. That is important and that will fuel her own thing about what she should do for her family when she grows up .. then the cycle continues otherwise we are going to lose our family values.")

Family seems to be a central component of self/role definition. Women executives assert the family defines their abilities. This is in consonance with the cultural beliefs in collectivist cultures.

(39- "I always feel that the family is the one, which actually makes you the best at work, you really work with all the constraints of budget and schedule at home too. You also know who is good at what and assign work accordingly. So I always have thought that the basic project management fundamentals- collaboration, team work, are all taught at home. Work is a larger family with a common goal. I always say that if you really know the stakeholder expectation from both (home and work) you should be able to manage it properly . . . .")

(39 “You go and preach to people about team work, about being very collaborative and also being culturally sensitive but I think that in the first place where we should practice all this is at home! At home you don’t want to be aligning with your in-laws, with your own parents, with the family and you don’t want to have team work, you want to be self centered when it comes to your money and when you do all this - how can you really go and teach these traits as a manager in the office? All such sermons seem to be applicable only in the office, but at home you are a very different person...... I always feel that when you are magnanimous, people really are magnanimous to you too -they keep helping you and in this profession without the support of family you can never flourish. I cannot really go and make an effective client presentation in San Juan, Puerto Rico with an apprehension that my daughter would not have got her lunch box"
to her college or school . . . I wouldn’t be successful at work either.”

The importance to family is given in all cultures but it is greater in collectivist cultures (Markus, 1991). The narrative of women executives clearly reflects the relative importance family is given and the need to transmit these values to the next generation.

Beliefs About Marriage and Motherhood

Westernization and belief in individuality does alter beliefs. Evidence of this is seen in the responses of interviewees. Some respondents believe that career is more fulfilling and should be placed above a family. (16- “There is a secondary priority for family in the field of investment banking. In investment banking there is no work life balance, let us be very clear. We are married to our jobs.”)

It is also acknowledged by some women executives that childlessness helps to focus on a career. They also say that it is not forced by external factors. More often than not, it is a personal choice. (84- “I don’t have kids. I made a conscious choice not to have kids, it is just my personal preference not to have a kid, but I have been married for 14 years now. . . .”), (72- “No children, you get more time at work.”) Single women executives feel that they tend to give too much importance to work. (35- “I think as singletons you end up being a little workaholic, at least my family considers me more workaholic than a normal person. I also think I give too much to in whatever I do.”) This however was a minority, and an overwhelming majority gave greater importance to family.

The belief in motherhood and marriage is universal but seems stronger in India, considering the number of respondents who expressed it. (57- “I strongly feel you need not have to come to a job to prove yourself as a woman, it could be done very well at home and in a much better way and you will have a very balanced family. I have seen that we do lose balance of the family when we come to work, you can replace another working woman but you can’t replace a mother, a mother’s role is something, which cannot be dispensed off. So I would prefer, in case if you are not economically in need of money or a job, it is always better
to be at home and still do things which fulfill you. One can balance one’s life if one has the right attitude.”) (71- “I am a working woman, and a mother who lives for her children.”)

Some women executives feel that motherhood actually enriches their life and it is an advantage in the long run though they may stand to lose in the short run (in terms of advancement of their careers). This belief shows that a degree of internalization occurs, which makes them rationalize the inequity in their career growth. (101- “I don’t subscribe to the 3 month maternity leave. It is too less a time when you want to bring a child into the world. I took a conscious decision of taking a 4 year period off from work. It did affect my career but it didn’t bother me because my priorities are different. I don’t even think it is wrong and that it affected my career. I took the call and it was a conscious choice. If there was a flexible option it would be good but when you take 4 years off, others have moved ahead and so they deserve to be ahead of you. A woman should not look at it negatively. A woman has a larger role to play. And men are missing out on the greatest years of their children. You cannot measure everything in terms of career. You are getting a great deal, which the man is not getting. Somewhere it does get balanced. I feel very strongly about it.”)

The women executives feel that the choice of a career can alter one’s personality and make one more aggressive and vocal. They echoed the popular belief that independent women would find it difficult to get good husbands, where marriage alliances between boys and girls are still arranged by the members of family. (17- “What happens to working women and independent women is they can’t get good people to marry. Many people are facing that problem, you can’t get good people to marry because you are overtly seen as too aggressive, too ambitious, so it is difficult and in India this whole thing of arranged marriage still is a very heavy load. After you are married, then people put pressures saying that you should not continue in your job, - leave your job and look after children, they insist and you have to give in.”)

Some others believe that motherhood is a conscious choice and the career is no excuse to not perform that duty. While some others acknowledge that
achieving work life balance is difficult and one can only try their best. (20- “I don’t agree with the concept that you don’t have time for your children if you are a working mother because I have seen women who are not working, but they have no time for their children because they are either going to the beauty parlors or they are going for their kitty parties or for their card parties so their children also are latch key kids. So if you want to look after your children you can be a working mother or a nonworking mother that doesn’t make a difference.”) (96- “Actually there should be a balance I agree with that, but the workplace pressures are now increasing quite a lot, it is quite difficult to fully balance. Not that if you are sitting at home you will do a better job of raising children, finally what turns out you never know, so you try your best.”)

Another angle expressed by the respondents is about equality. However this is dominated by cultural beliefs regarding the ultimate role of a woman. (56- “I think that while we are studying and are young... we always say men are equivalent to women, we sit for competitive exams and we have done quite as well so why should we not be considered equals, the thought process is always there at the back of one’s mind especially in the earlier stages, but I would still stay, take time for family and also end of the day bonding happens only with the person who is taking care of the family... ”) The opinions about motherhood clearly show the conflict between the need to enact and live the social role and the need to fulfill oneself. (62- “My mother was there till my younger one became 2 years old, the elder one I had to send him along with my mother for a year that is something which I still repent because that 1 year I lost in being with him.”) (71- “That is quite amazing but you know how many people struggle with just that identity of ‘I am a good mother’. I can’t tell you how women that I have spoken to say that they are broken because they were just moms. Then I ask them why? You have done such a fantastic job. I think what happens is motherhood is something where you are giving a lot, you are giving and giving and giving and while you receive unconditional love from your children there is a part of you says that we had nothing for ourselves where we used our skill for ourselves.”) The views about marriage and motherhood clearly evidence the
struggle to accommodate cultural values and the need for agency. The awareness
of this is also evidenced in the reflective discourse regarding the influence of socio
cultural roles in conditioning their own perception of their role.

Perceptions About the Social Roles to be Played

Social roles condition expected behavior of different members of the family. The role of a woman is primary in the upbringing of a child however the women executives do feel that the role of a man should not be completely dismissed. (07- “Because the woman is expected to look after the house and the family and do all of that, which the man assumes is her housekeeper role, it could be misconstrued in some situations. What a man has to do, being a father or parent is minimal and skewed in our own family setup as well.”)

(16-“We are conditioned to accept that our father will not be at home, he can miss birthdays, he can miss lot of things because he is at work. For our generation our mothers were at home always for us, so we often feel guilty that we are not there for our children. If our children have friends whose mothers are not working then it compounds. It is acceptable that papa is not there but for them ‘mama is not there’ becomes a big thing so that weighs down the woman. I know my mother used to be at home so I do feel bad that I am not there for my children and I have heard of my friends whose children say that other people’s mothers are there why are you not there? My daughter too says – “Why are you going to office? Why don’t you stay at office?” But I rarely see her asking my husband that, though she is equally close to him because she thinks fathers have to go work maybe that is the way we are brought up, and that is our conditioning, it has nothing to do with what we tell them.”)

However there is a change in the way men perceive their role as parents and this has a definite impact on a woman’s role as a mother according to the respondents. (02-“I feel the change ,which is happening today because of modernization in the attitude of men also, many of them are helping, which was not there earlier, it was entirely a woman’s job ,which is not there now. This is a
good sign and that is how maybe a lot of women are now working and continuing even after having babies.”) Social mores and lifestyles are changing and the joint family system is disappearing to give place for the nuclear, independent family. The women executives see the need for balancing as the key issue for the next generation. (61-“Balance is the challenge of the next generation. After breaking expectations of the previous situations the present generation has a tougher challenge in front of them. Emotional preparedness is less for the pressures and so while each generation gets a certain skill set, it still needs to prepare itself to handle the new situation. It is no longer a gender issue because both women and men have now lower emotional preparedness and higher expectations.”)

The sense of agency is also reflected in the narrative of women executives when they express the need to reflect and address their issues. This is however within the cultural paradigm. The traces of religio-cultural beliefs are seen in their narrative. It is believed that personal understanding of one’s duties or dharma helps in balancing the work and home demands effectively. Clarity of one’s goals, priorities and purpose, according to the women executives, puts the immediate duty into perspective and helps an individual in adding value at both places.

(44- “The conviction should come from within and you can’t always look up to somebody for solution, be it your husband or anybody else. You know you may have an issue with your mother-in-law and you can’t always look up to your husband to give you the solution you should know how to deal with that situation.”)

(44- “It comes automatically, when you are clear about what is your dharma (obligatory responsibility), then at that point of time you know what is the right thing to do and there is this little voice it is always cautioning you. You are in the meeting and there is somebody at home waiting for you, they are demanding your attention, your office cannot be used as a means of escape from some duties at home. So that clarity, I think at a personal level, we must develop and when we know what our priorities are, it is pretty much easy to put that into practice both at work and at home. But you should add value. The day you stop adding
Thus cultural beliefs shape personal values and societal values. The analysis of the narratives is presented at the end of this chapter.

4.4.4 Quantitative Findings

The responses of 90 women executives regarding socio cultural beliefs and their demographic details provide an insight into the socio cultural issues that form the context within which executive women define themselves. The demographic profile of the respondents of the survey (90) and the interview (105) are presented in a table. Both the groups show high educational qualifications. 73% of the Interview sample and 84% of the Survey sample have done either post graduate studies or have acquired professional degrees. This is in keeping with the cultural belief in education as an important priority in life. (See Table 4.1 and Figure 4.2)

Marriage and motherhood are other culturally important factors. Majority of the women executives are married and have children. Marriage is a cultural norm in India, and 75% of the survey sample and 83% of the Interview sample of women executives are married. The 16 women (survey sample) and 14 women of the (Interview sample) who are single also include younger executives who may marry eventually. The Single, divorced or widowed category is very small. (Table 4.2 and Figure 4.3)

Childlessness due to career choices, evidenced in many studies, does not
Figure 4.2: The educational qualifications of women executives

![Educational Qualification Chart]

Table 4.2: The marital status of women executives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Interview Sample</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Survey Sample</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced, Widowed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3: The marital status of women executives

![Marital Status Chart]
seem to be the norm among women executives in India. Majority of women executives in the survey sample have children 68% and 32% have no children. This includes women who are single too. Among the executive women in the interview sample, 81% have children and only 14% do not have children. The sample without children includes younger executives who may eventually marry and have children. (Table 4.3)

The demographic profile of the 195 women executives show that education, marriage and motherhood are important components of the lives of women executives in India.

### 4.4.5 Socio-cultural Perceptions of Women Executives

Beliefs and attitudes of women executives regarding their role, status and priorities may be in consonance with socio cultural beliefs or may be in variance with them. This will however depend on the degree of internalization and the degree of delineation the women executives have achieved from the socio-cultural beliefs that shape them. The perception of women executives regarding these beliefs is measured on a 7 point likert scale. The statements used in the questionnaire focus on beliefs regarding the role of women, their priorities, the socio cultural expectations, and their social status relative to men. The analysis of the mean values of scores given to each belief is presented in Figure 4.4. (The words in bold text are used as key words in the analysis and in the figures).

The average response to each of the specific socio-cultural beliefs shows that there is variation in perception of women executives regarding them. Women executives rated the following beliefs higher –

- Women have to take maximum **responsibility** on the home front.(4.99)
4.4. CONTEXT

Figure 4.4: The mean value of scores of socio-cultural beliefs

- Gender based discrimination exists in the society, in terms of respect given to women. (4.33)

- Gender based discrimination exists in the Indian culture, in terms of role definition. (4.01)

- Personal appearance and behaviour are more important for a woman as compared to a man.(4.31)

- The woman’s contribution at home is devalued in our society.(4.27)

The beliefs that score moderately on an average are –

- There is a conflict in the role of a ‘good mother’ and the role of a professional, high achieving woman. (3.96)

- For an Indian woman family is first and career is the second priority. (3.91)

- One must settle in a career and then consider marriage and children. (3.57)

- Gender is a silly issue, it need not be talked about. (3.5)

- Working mothers are seen as selfish people who place individual satisfaction above everything else.(3.39)
• A wife should not have a higher status than her husband. (3.2)

• Excessive talk about gender is tantamount to discrimination against men. (3.07) (keyword- biased)

• The role of women as defined by Indian epics is totally irrelevant. (3.03)

Low scores were given for the following beliefs on an average by women executives.

• A wife must not earn more than her husband. (2.98)

• Increase in the number of women in the workplace will affect families in the long run. (key word is impact) (2.9)

• It is the man’s job to earn and the women’s job to care for the family. (2.66)

• A woman’s place is at home and not at workplace. (2.16)

In order to find the underlying beliefs that influence overall beliefs regarding the role of a woman and the respect she is given in society, the Kano Model is used. This model was originally used in marketing studies to study consumer satisfaction and product attributes and is used for decision making (Bartikowski & Llosa, 2004). An adaptation of this model is used to find the congruence between the stated, specific beliefs and overall beliefs of the women executives. Those stated beliefs, which impact the overall belief greatly can be identified and this will help in getting an insight into the nature of socio-cultural bias as experienced by women executives.

General socio-cultural beliefs

There are two statements in the questionnaire which solicit the general perception of social bias by women executives. They are-

1. Gender based discrimination exists in the society, in terms of respect given to women.

2. Gender based discrimination exists in the Indian culture, in terms of role definition.
Responses for the general beliefs are studied to know if these beliefs are felt by women executives and to what degree. Details in terms of frequency and degree of response are presented here. (The various opinions are scaled on a range of 1 to 7. Lower scores imply it does not exist, while higher scores imply it exists, 0 implies no answer. The highlighted words refer to the key labels used in the tables and the Kano model.)

Gender based discrimination exists in the society, in terms of respect given to women. 48% believe it exists, 23% give a more midway score, while 23% believe it to be less in the society. (Figure 4.5)

Since both these biases are said to exist by many women executives (though in varying degrees), we proceed to the next step of analyzing the responses to specific social biases.

**Specific Socio-cultural Beliefs**

14 statements regarding the priorities, position and role of women, as enumerated in Tab above form the specific beliefs are rated by women executives. (The various opinions are scaled on a range of 1 to 7 (lower scores imply it does not exist, while higher scores imply it exists .0 implies no answer). The underlined words refer to the key labels used in the tables and the Kano model.)

Stated Beliefs The responses to the specific biases are averaged and are arranged in decreasing order. The values are then converted in to relative percentage. And this constitutes the scores of stated beliefs. See the tabular format gener-
Derived Beliefs

Each of the stated beliefs is correlated with the general beliefs, using the Pearsonian coefficient. The ‘r’ is squared to eliminate the direction of correlation and calculate coefficient of correlation, which facilitates comparisons. The ‘r^2’ are then converted into relative percentages, which form the derived beliefs. See the tabular format of derived beliefs generated using SPSS Package (Figure 4.7)

The stated beliefs and derived beliefs are then plotted in a scatter diagram to interpret the relationship between the two. The scores are classified into four categories—those with high derived and stated values (must be addressed issues), those with low stated and derived values (non issues), those with low stated values but high derived values (covert issues) and those with low derived value but with high stated values (Basic issues). The nomenclature of these four categories is based on the kind of action expected or importance these social beliefs/issues have for women executives. The diagrams and their interpretation are presented in the figures that follow.

Kano Model (General Belief-Role)

Basic Issues According to Kano’s model, beliefs that have high stated value and low derived value highlight basic issues, which have to be addressed in the social culture. They are minimum expected factors that need to be addressed in terms of the role definition conflicts that women face. Women executives believe that the fact that they have to play two conflicting roles of mother and executive must be understood. Their added responsibility at home must be appreciated and the tendency to judge them on appearance and behavior must be lesser so that the role definition bias can be handled.

Non Issues Those beliefs that have low stated and derived values, do not impact role definition much. In this case, the following beliefs have low impact on women executives’ role definition. Basic social beliefs that a woman’s place is at home and not at workplace or that a wife should not have a higher status than her husband were considered non issues in terms of the role definition of women executives. Also the role definition that believes that the man’s job is
## Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Labels</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Stated Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.988889</td>
<td>1.92263</td>
<td>9.61662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.311111</td>
<td>1.99237</td>
<td>8.310131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devaluation</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.266667</td>
<td>2.010087</td>
<td>8.224459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.955556</td>
<td>1.976895</td>
<td>7.624759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.911111</td>
<td>2.112799</td>
<td>7.539088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.566667</td>
<td>2.198314</td>
<td>6.875134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.12132</td>
<td>6.746627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.388889</td>
<td>1.784417</td>
<td>6.532448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.199081</td>
<td>6.168344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.066667</td>
<td>1.959133</td>
<td>5.91133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epics</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.033333</td>
<td>2.309969</td>
<td>5.847076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.977778</td>
<td>2.192827</td>
<td>5.739987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.748515</td>
<td>5.590062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.655556</td>
<td>1.836956</td>
<td>5.118869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.155556</td>
<td>1.620869</td>
<td>4.155065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51.87778</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each of the stated beliefs is correlated with the general beliefs, using the Pearsonian coefficient. The $r$ is squared to eliminate the direction of correlation and calculate the coefficient of correlation, which facilitates comparisons. The $r^2$ are then converted into relative percentages, which form the derived beliefs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stated Beliefs</th>
<th>General belief correlated with stated beliefs (respect)</th>
<th>General belief correlated with stated beliefs (role)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key labels</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>$r^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased</td>
<td>0.242039</td>
<td>0.058583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>0.376191</td>
<td>0.14152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>0.134111</td>
<td>0.017986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn</td>
<td>0.065049</td>
<td>0.004231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>0.324107</td>
<td>0.105046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.036866</td>
<td>0.001359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>0.060862</td>
<td>0.003704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>0.201627</td>
<td>0.040653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epics</td>
<td>0.347972</td>
<td>0.121084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devaluation</td>
<td>0.529344</td>
<td>0.280206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>0.331449</td>
<td>0.109858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness</td>
<td>0.425612</td>
<td>0.181146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>0.178591</td>
<td>0.031895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>0.33737</td>
<td>0.113819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>0.473217</td>
<td>0.223934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to earn and the women’s job is to care for the family and so the wife must not earn more than her husband was rated low. The women executives also did not think that there is a conflict in the role of a ‘good mother’ and the role of a ‘professional, high achieving woman. Consequently the belief that increase in the number of women in the workplace will affect families in the long run (key word is impact), was also rated low. They also felt that excessive talk about gender is not tantamount to discrimination against men (key word is biased). This is also echoed in the low rating given to the belief that gender is a silly issue, and that it need not be talked about. The belief that one must settle in a career and then consider marriage and children was rated higher than the others. This shows the importance given to marriage and motherhood.

**Must be Addressed Issues** Two specific beliefs were rated high and also have higher derived value. The specific belief that for an Indian woman family is first and career is the second priority is rated high and it influences their role definition too. The other belief that the woman’s contribution at home is devalued in our society also has high stated and derivative score, proving that the bias in role definition is mainly driven by the devaluation of the contribution and the fact that she nevertheless gives the home greater priority than her job.

**Covert Issues**

The role of women defined by our epics is totally irrelevant. This specific belief was rated low on an average by the women executives, indicating its relevance. The belief that working mothers are seen as selfish people who place individual satisfaction above everything else was also rated low. However their derived value is high, proving that they do impact the role definition. Thus in an unstated and unconscious sense epics do influence role definition and consequently fear selfishness implied in the act of pursuing their desire for a career. See the Kano model in (Figure 4.8)

**Kano Model (General Belief- Respect)**

A similar analysis is also done in terms of another general belief namely the degree of respect accorded by society to women.

**Basic Issues**
The beliefs that have high stated value and low derived value highlight basic issues, which have to be addressed in the social culture. They are minimum expected factors that need to be addressed in order to ensure the due respect for women executives in society. Their added responsibility at home must be appreciated and the tendency to judge them on appearance and behavior must be lesser. The specific belief that for an Indian woman family is first and career is the second priority is explicit and women executives believe that they must be acknowledged for it.

Non Issues

Those beliefs that have low stated and derived values, do not impact the perception of respect for women executives. In this case, the following beliefs have low impact on women executives’ definition of respect. Basic social beliefs that a woman’s place is at home and not at workplace or that a wife should not have a higher status than her husband were considered non issues in terms of impact on perceived respect among women executives. Also the social belief
that the man’s job is to earn and the women’s job is to care for the family and so the wife must not earn more than her husband was rated low. The women executives also did not think that there is a conflict in the role of a ‘good mother’ and the role of a ‘professional, high achieving woman. Consequently the belief that increase in the number of women in the workplace will affect families in the long run (key word is impact), was also rated low. They also felt that excessive talk about gender is not tantamount to discrimination against men (key word is biased). The belief that one must settle in a career and then consider marriage and children was rated higher than the others and its derived value was moderate. The role of women defined by our epics in terms of its impact on perceived effect was rated moderately by the women executives.

**Must be Addressed Issues**

Two specific beliefs were rated high and also have higher derived value. The perception that the woman’s contribution at home is devalued in our society and the perception that women take more responsibility on the home front, both these beliefs contribute to the area in which respect is defined for Indian women executives. Thus the lack of respect is sensed when their role at home is not given due acknowledgement.

**Covert Issues** The belief that working mothers are seen as selfish people who place individual satisfaction above everything else was also rated low. However their derived value is high, proving that they do impact the perception of bias in terms of respect for women executives in a covert way. Low rating is also given to the belief that gender is a silly issue, and that it need not be talked about, though it has higher derived value. (Figure 4.9)

### 4.5 Setting

In Layder’s Adaptive theory, the setting refers to more immediate environment, like the workplace or home, where women executives face issues. They are not necessarily patterned, nevertheless they define their experience. The field in the Structuration theory relates to macro and micro factors that shape and
influence the actor. Thus, setting refers to the micro factors within which the women executives face their challenges and define themselves.

Work life balance discourse examines the family and work related factors that affect work life balance. The benefits that both organizations and individual accrue when work life balance is achieved, is also researched (Naithani, 2010). Workplace and home are both demanding in terms of time, energy, and involvement. Work life balance refers to the way in which a person balances work related goals and personal aims which involve family and friends. When career is favored above family and personal time, it causes burnouts and stress related diseases. Work life balance also refers to the stress women feel when they have to choose between career and family. Stress has physiological and psychological impact. Wood and Newton (2006) point out that the choice to be childless may be promoted because of the structural and situational constraints imposed by the workplace. Social support plays an important role in reducing this stress. Calling attention to the fact that career must be made
compatible to child rearing, Henrekson and Stenkula (2009) say that changes in career time profile and career commitment should not be linked with time spent at work. The opportunity cost of building a career is affected by the availability of services, which manage household work and the emotional cost of losing time with offsprings, they concluded. The unwillingness of a woman executive to relocate, which often dampens her career prospect is affected by family attributes too (Baldridge et al., 2006). Organizations recognize this and take measures to improve work life balance for both men and women employees. Women executives were asked questions about how they achieved work life balance in the interview. The questionnaire specifically measures organizational and social factors like relocation, travel, organizational facilities and degree of support they receive from family and hired help. These findings are presented below.

4.5.1 Qualitative Findings about Social Support

The major support or pressure for women executives to achieve work life balance comes from family and organizations. The narrative of women executives, confirms this. It also reveals finer nuances involved in using or maintaining these support systems. (80- “My family has been supportive in the sense that my parents and in-laws they are ok with me coming back to work, they drop in whenever there is an emergency, so I think that is important. My husband too, is very supportive. He knows there are days when I have a lot of work and I am late so he has to take care of the baby. So I cannot do it without them. And my team as well as my office is also very good about it in terms of offering flexible timings. As long as the work gets done and it is delivered, it is fine.”) (See Figure 4.10

Family as a Support System

Support systems are seen as crucial factors for work life balance for women executives. (04- “I think for a woman to work you need have good support
systems, be it your husband, your parents, your in-laws or even the servants.”. If you do not have a family, which supports you in hard times, then you will be in trouble. I really don’t know how to manage without my family’s support.”. “My children have been very independent, I have a husband who is very, very supportive, my parents have been supportive too.”) The family may consist of spouse, parents and in-laws.

The benefits from family as a support system is defined from many angles—
(04- “enable you to function smoothly...”, 13- “they supervise, say the hired help that you may have at home...” 51- “I hired a babysitter, so she used to be there throughout the day and take care of the baby’s needs, my mother-in-law would supervise so the child was not left alone and I used to travel.”, 16- “An accommodative family reduces emotional strain...”, 36- “you don’t have guilt...”, 48- “mentally I am very peaceful. Having somebody at home make you feel your daughter is safe.”)

Respondents also reiterate the need to consciously nurture family support to sustain it. They speak of attitudes and actions necessary for this. (30- “give importance to relatives who help...”, 48- “There is nothing wrong in seeking support if you have elders at home, in fact there is nothing like it but don’t think you don’t want to live with them- it doesn’t make sense, so there you will have to do some compromise. Do that because overall you are benefitting...”, 59- “Give and take is very important in life as well as in work place and so it is
important to create that kind of networking. The support systems must be kept in place for work life balance and if they don’t exist you have to create it.”)

Social Support Through Maids and Other External Groups

Another extensively used support system is from external groups like day care centers, creches, and hired services of maids. In cities where commutes are time consuming and working hours are long, these services are seen as crucial ones. (01-“If you consider it in a city like Bombay where I have my work base, which is 2 hours away from my home and I need to travel, say 1 or 2 hours every day to and fro, it becomes difficult. . . . the need for a support system is very high.”). Some use baby sitters, (80-“It is expensive but you can still hire very good babysitters who will come home and take care. I have a friend of mine who is doing that and she is trying to work at the same time.”). Some prefer bringing women in difficult circumstance from their home towns or villages to the city to baby sit and help at home. They believe it ensures that children get the right values. (03-“When my daughter was born we had a lady from a village from Tamil Nadu to come and stay with us. She was an elderly lady and was a widow so I thought it was good, we were helping her in some ways so we brought her home and she stayed for 7-8 years with us. . . . and she also added value to my life here because my daughter was being trained the way I would like her to get trained.”). However this form of support is now dwindling as new job opportunities are developing in villages too. (96-“People used to be willing to come from villages, today work opportunities are there, they don’t want to move out from their areas. Earlier safety was not an issue now lots of problems are there, people are becoming more self centered. In cities these things are becoming very difficult, it is scary, people are not trustworthy”.

While some saw maids as part of family (10-“I have a very good helper, (I won’t call her a maid) who has been with us since my older one was born, which is 20 years.”), some others expressed their fears about hiring maids. (15-“They (maids) are not educated so you can imagine the value systems that are getting
into them (children), junk TV, which gets into their minds... they haven’t got the value system, like for us our parents had always been there to tell us ok this is right and this is wrong. Here we are leaving them to get figure it out on their own, so obviously it is going to scar them in the long term.”). There were also concerns about habits of maids, which may be undesirable. (31- “I have had a situation where the maid had come with tons and tons of tobacco. I just sacked her when I realized this because you never know they just can give it to the child or put something in the water and the baby can sleep for hours!”) Single women executives also acknowledged the need for house help. (35 – “I live alone in Mumbai and I have a part-time cook and a part-time cleaning lady to assist me at home.”)

Maintaining external support systems also needs employers to show flexibility in attitude and effort in recognizing the value of the support system. (51- “You should realize that you will have to use support and that support could be maids or drivers and others. You have to learn to show a certain level of maturity in dealing with them. You should make it very clear to them that they are your support system and that you value them very much. For example when I got a promotion I gave a small token bonus to all my support staff so that they know that they are participating in this and they look forward to supporting me. Also don’t have too much expectation that everything should be spic and span and neat.”)

**Spousal Support**

The attitude and support of spouse is one of the most important factors in achieving work life balance or even in pursuing a career.

**Attitude**– A spouse’s support may be expressed as an attitude of understanding or encouragement. (54- “God has blessed me with a husband who is so encouraging, not just encouraging, he feels very proud about my achievements. He would probably talk more about my achievements than I myself would and so it is with my children, they too feel very proud that their mom is successful.”)
If the nature and priorities of the couple match, consideration for each other is easier to achieve. (10—“My husband and I are very social people, so that helps. If he was one of those awkward guys then it would have been very tough.”) (51—“It also depends on the understanding of your spouse and the maturity of your child. My husband was a batch mate, and so the understanding attitude is there.”). If the spouse works in the same industry, the understanding attitude would be greater. (60—“If their spouse is from the same industry then there is better understanding. If the spouse is from a different industry then there could be conflicts.”) An unfavorable attitude from the spouse can be a major reason to drop out of a professional life. (“I think it is a pressure from the husband as well if they are dropping out because after sometime your job is not as important as your husband’s is, that is for sure, most of them believe. There are only an X percentage of men who are extremely westernized in their thought process, who think that women are equal to them.”) A negative attitude of the spouse can be huge barrier. (69—“My husband, he was the biggest hurdle for me”). Those with a typical male mind set may create more difficulty to a working woman.(99—“I am the man of a house I will not do this and I will not do that – kind of attitudes do exist, but it depends on the nature of the man. If he doesn’t mind making your morning coffee or if he doesn’t mind clearing the table, it just gets easier on you. I know women who have to handle this work life balance along with having to deal with the typical male mindset. It becomes very challenging for them”). Some believe that spouse can be influenced to change his attitude over time. (90—“I think women are very good at handling the emotional part of any decision, even tuning your husband to help you in your work over a period of time. Immediately after marriage he is not tuned to help you, but over a period of time maybe 1 or 3 years down the line you can tune him to help you in your work, I think that helps.”)

Adjustments – Physical support from the spouse through sharing of responsibility at home is also acknowledged by executive women as a major support. (46—“If I am travelling, my husband doesn’t and if he is travelling, I don’t, so that somebody can care for the children. It is fortunate when both partners
understand each other’s needs and adjust.”) (37- “My husband was very supportive so that always helped. You know I would start my day early, he would bathe, dress, feed the kids, drop them off and then I would come back a little early and pick them up.”), (76- “The reason behind my being in senior management, today is purely because of my husband and every time I used to take an exam or something he would take the children away to his mom’s place or somewhere and make sure that I do well. So today whatever I am, I owe it to him.”) The upbringing of men and social conditioning is identified as a reason why men do not support their wives in physical work and the responsibility of home. (81- “He doesn’t bother about anything. He comes very late at around 10:30 – 11:00 pm., so he spends very less time with the kids, whereas from the moment I go home, I spend time with the kids. My daughter she is getting great grades 595/600, 598/600 in her exams... It is because I teach her everyday. I will go through her class notes every day, teach her, spend time with her, read books.... I do all the parenting!”) (98- “Men think that if they pay for it, everything gets done! If they give their salary towards running the home, it is enough. Everything should be automatic, in the sense they don’t need to know about the problems of running the home, they do not want to know whether the servant has come, or how food comes on the table, or how everything gets organized, or how the kids went to school and did they get back, or how they fared through their exams.”)

Women too are conditioned by their culture to give more importance to their role as a mother as compared to men. (36- “To me it is the single biggest issue that most working women face and especially women who have been conditioned and brought up in my kind of environment where the role of the mother is very important part of who you are...”) (11- “Personally I think work life balance only comes by experience, seriously speaking you just can’t do it the first time, when I had to do it the first time I fell ill, my health went totally for a toss. My husband comes from a family where he has two sisters who did all the work in the house, he just didn’t know how to help. He has never helped in the house, even now I keep on complaining ....... it is not that he is a disorganized person and he is not very rigid, he is very flexible, but I get zero help from him for the
house work. I have to practically see to the entire home management. This is a very childhood thing and it is very much in our country. And then we have these maids...abroad it is not there....so people are used to doing their work.”

**Career Advice** - Timely and appropriate advice regarding career or other issues on the job front was also recognized as an important form of support from spouses. (10- He understands, in fact he advised me...when I was younger I got a lot of offers from banks. I was very tempted because they used to offer triple the salary I was earning then. My husband was very practical, he was saying “see you are working in a business where you are well respected and well known, you have the potential to become an industry specialist. Why do you want go into banking because you will be competing with the IIMs and the Harvard educated and they will not treat you with respect.” So he advised me to stick to the industry I was working in.”)

**Emotional Support** - The emotional support provided by spouses, especially while learning the ropes at work is considered as an important support by women executives. (102- “The growing years of my son and my job were difficult to handle. I used to get up at 4.15 a.m. and finish cooking, wake my son and dress him to go to school and then go to work. It was a trying period. My husband was supportive in the sense that he never made too many demands on me. I may not be able to say that he was supportive in all respects but he did allow me freedom and did not question me or interfere. I could tell my husband that I’m busy today and so please eat out. My mother took care of the baby when I was at work. I definitely had the support of my family. My husband also encouraged me to be independent, taught me driving and refused to help me when he thought that I should learn things on my own. I definitely owe my thanks to him for the emotional support that he provided. But as far as physical support is concerned he would not help me in the chores of the house. Today he is more dependent on me to do even external work. But I owe my confidence and independence to him.”
4.5.2 Qualitative Findings About Organizational Support

Other than social factors, organizational factors form the other end of the continuum that affect the work life balance. While many initiatives like flexi timing, reentry after a career break, sabbaticals and setting up of facilities like creches are adopted by many organizations to address these issues, the actual benefit is viewed with mixed feelings by women executives. (Figure 4.11)

Tangible Support Systems in the Organization

The following organizational support systems are helpful in promoting work life balance for women executives in India. Women executives express their opinions in terms of the efficacy and inherent problems in the support systems. Being executives they consider the organizational as well as the individual perspective about the usage and cost of each convenience provided to improve work life balance.

**Flexi Timing, Reentry, and Work From Home Options**

Flexi timing is seen as an important factor in organizations to help work life balance. (13-“flexibility can go a long way in retaining women in the workplace...
and ensuring that they do not leave midway because of challenges and pressures at home, so that is something I still believe we have a long way to go in India.”)

There are critical points in life, when a woman executive needs support, and that is when the organization should be proactive to support them. (58- “There is a point of time in their (women executives) lives where they need to either care for the old, have children or take care of young children or whatever, if the organization can support them through that period they will come back.”), (83- “In fact we have had some senior women who have taken 2-3 months off when their kids are in class X, class XII. They feel that they need to be there for their children during the exams.”) However there were some reservations expressed regarding its usability at higher levels. Flexi timing is considered impossible at higher levels as work is non-routine and needs the presence of the executive. Besides, in industries where in skills have to be updated continuously, reentry is difficult. (05- “When you are in a cut throat business vertical you can’t do part-time you can’t deliver… you can’t do all these flexi timings, part-timings, because of comeback skills are difficult to get… you know things change so fast, look at the way the world is changing in 2 years…”)

It cannot be used in some industries where work involves long hours or interdependent tasks. (14- “In the hospitality industry it is definitely a factor. It is a major factor because of the kind of hours that we need to put in. When you start off in hotel operations, the job entails working in shifts and that does become difficult if you have commitments.) Where it is possible to use work from home facilities, women executives seem to welcome it. (07- “When children are slightly older and under control then you can get time. Till then e-space makes it easier for people to work. They have the flexibility of working from home and I think that more companies should give that. You don’t have to be physically structured in the office, 6 days a week!”)

(24- “Even in the IT industry where there is a greater use of this facility, women opt for European shift (1PM. to 9 AM.) as compared to the American shift (6.30PM. to 2AM.). People are opting for what we call the European shift which is starting at about 1 in the afternoon and goes on till 9 in the night
because that way they feel they are being able to be there in the morning when the children are going to school, they are being able to take of their households a little bit. Generally, in instances like this husbands would be coming home at 7:30 – 8:00 PM. So by the time you get home at 9 that part has been taken care of and you are again spending time for dinner with children. I think it is working out well from the traditional 9-7 kind of a thing, and what we try to do as senior leaders in the organization is we try to put women in this kind of a shift which is very family friendly rather than a North America shift which starts at 6:30 in the evening and goes on till about 2 in the morning”)

The biggest challenge of giving flexi time or a few months of ‘working from home’ is that it typically increases the burden for other colleagues. (58- “The line managers are hyper because they complain that while she is doing work from home, the work done is little in proportion to others and obviously she can’t get as much done as she would be able to do in the office. So somebody else takes the pressure.”)

**Sabbaticals**

While sabbaticals are being offered to improve one’s credentials or to manage work life balance, they come with a price. (07- “Many companies now are saying that you can take the sabbatical.”), (83- “It is very flexible like - I have come in today at 11:30 in the morning, so I mean there is no ‘you have to be here at 09:00’. I work till late so I do the hours ,which suit me, so 11:00 – 11:30, I normally come in. I have a music class today so I will leave at around 8:00 – 08:30, I will go for my class, so that way it is very flexible and lot of women have taken sabbaticals and they have taken time off and joined back.”). Others who take the load when a person goes on leave may however complain. (16- “If you are going to take a sabbatical then it is unfair for you to think that ok then I will be in the same hierarchy for promotion.”) 83-(“I have a friend who is working here as a Vice President in HR and she was from IIM (A), a consistent top performer in ****** and she took a year off. She went and taught at Pondicherry at the Aurobindo Ashram for a year and then she came back. So they do, do that...”)
4.5. SETTING

Reentry

While organizations are considering the option of offering temporary breaks, it is felt that, in India, this is not used in a big way by employees. (14-“We (as an organization) are very open to people leaving and joining back again. In fact we encourage a lot of people who may have left to start a family that is the time when the attrition is high.”) Despite the openness, there are not many people who opt for it. (14-“I haven’t found many people really taking a break from work they may take little more leave or they may reserve their leave to take it at a time when the children have their exams.”) In the IT industry, reentry is difficult since the technology keeps evolving and it is easier to get outdated unless you are continuously in touch. (82-“I know a friend of mine who did a reentry very beautifully. She got married then her support fell apart so she had to take a break for 5 years, but then when she came I think she was totally open to it. She also had her expectations absolutely set right and she said ok if somebody is going to treat me like a fresher I am totally prepared for it because this is IT industry and I have had a 5 years gap, so I understand that I am going to be behind my peers.”)

Facilities – Creche

Setting up a creche can help women executives to achieve a better work life balance. The benefits of having the facilities were expressed by many respondents. (10- “If they setup a creche so the parents can come and see the child in the afternoon, you can feed the child, you can go in the morning drop the child, go in the evening and pick them up, all that you would do at home.”) However, the problems of establishing a creche and using the facility were also expressed. One of the objections was the uselessness of a centralized creche when offices are spread out and the other was the cost factor for the organization in setting a decentralized setup. (15- In an organization like ***** maybe be it is not possible because the infrastructure is spread out. We have 13 around offices spread across in the city.”), (51- “There is a cost factor and also the distance factor...”) The need to cut costs and the legal hassle involved in establishing a creche also acts like a deterrent in some industries. (88-“Manufacturing ins-
dustries have less women, partially because of the legal structure. The law says that, if you have this many women you must provide a creche. This means additional cost. And the Japanese firms are sensitive about cost-cutting. They look at it from that angle. And also that the culture they come from does not really encourage women.) Another challenge to using a creche is the long commute required to reach the organizational creche and the unavailability of good a creche near home. (31- “For the mother’s to bring the baby, if they are taking the commute in local trains or buses, how is the mother going to bring the baby? You need creche at the work place or you need a good creche near home. I am talking of the way the city has developed you don’t have that many.”) (51- “I wouldn’t want my child to travel 1 hour in the bus; I would rather put her somewhere nearby where she is more comfortable.”) The facilities in the creche and the quality of service are something that the mothers are concerned about. (96- “Here we have a creche, which is not good enough but then it is convenient because we have very early timings. Our office starts from 07:30, so at that time to get any creche is also very difficult, there are lot of creches, which operate at around 08:30-09:00. . . . . . . Other factors like the is food, the environment in a child’s creche, the beds should be good,. . . otherwise most people prefer to leave them at home. If you can have alternative arrangements, they would prefer that unless it is very expensive.”). Some women executives expressed that the location of the office affected their choice of organization. The need for having an office closer to home to achieve an optimum work life balance often influenced their choice of a job. (31- “Location did affect my job choice.”)

**Space in the Office**

It was also felt that organizations should keep some space in office where children or others can be made to sit when they are brought to office in an emergency situation. (55- “We still lack a lot of help that we can easily provide for women, like for example - if I don’t have somebody to care of my kids I can’t even get them here, there is no room! There is no way that I can get them even to a waiting room or something.”)

**Business Case for Part Timers**
Part time jobs are possible in IT industry and they are comparatively more women friendly. There is also a business case for part timers. It helps to use a greater talent pool and also helps in show casing the diversity policy of the firm.

(84- “Part time jobs is not just something fashionable, it is something that the business demands because it is a service industry, we hire 12000 people every year and women are half of the population, so if we don’t make a conscious effort to attract them, we are losing a large part of the talent pool. That is one reason and the second reason is that a lot of our customers especially from America, they expect to see women when they walk into a board room and they have a meeting. If it is all completely male dominated they will question- where is your diversity policy?”)

(84- “I have a friend in ******* and he was mentioning that they have a percentage that they have to hire- so many housewives as part-timers every month. They actually have targets to ensure that part-timer women to come to the work force! I think the opportunities are getting more and more for women.”)

Travel

One of the problems that women executives face is that of travelling. Jobs require extensive travelling at short notice and this is difficult when you have a family to look after. (82- “I am a single mother and I have dependencies, so tomorrow if I want to pick up skills, maybe I just want to go back to school or if I just want to take a break, I might not be able to do it. I will have that pressure and if I have to relocate I have to think about thousand things- will I have a support system in the place where I go and all that. So maybe at times it could be a little disappointing that you cannot really do everything that you want but I think that is what makes us realize that we cannot not be equal to men because of these factors.”) While this sentiment was echoed by many (21- “For a man business travel is a status symbol, but for a woman business travel means headache.”), there were also some women who felt that travelling is necessary for high profile jobs and can be used in an advantageous manner. (71- “I was in a job where I travelled quite extensively and you know staying in hotels you did
find time for yourself, reflection to chill out a bit maybe, just go to the gym.”)

(39- “I have travelled overseas more than 75 times in the last 25 years. I have been overseas when I was 6 weeks pregnant and I have been overseas when I just got a baby of four and a half months and I have worked in projects where it involved 3 shifts when I was still feeding my child.”) Some organizations deliberately give postings outside the region of residence to ensure mobility and willingness and adjustment of family. (72- “We have taken a decision in our company that if you join in the southern region, the first posting is actually given to some other region for the women on their confirmation. So they get used to the new style, they get used to living without families or making adjustments, the family learns to adjust without them and after sometime, if there is a lot of family pressure they are brought back.”)

Alternate Jobs

Though not always feasible, alternate jobs can ease the work life balance for the woman executive and yet not compromise on organizational efficiency.

(88- “If you are doing a sales and marketing role it is very difficult for you to sit and do all of that from home, but do you want to then take a break from that role for a short while do something else?, Is the organization willing to accommodate that request? and so long as they hold you accountable and you live up to that trust, it will work…”)

(79- “I still remember going back to my boss and telling him my doctor has asked me to take bed rest and I am not coming for 3 months, then he told me that it doesn’t work that way. So I was moved out to a proposal role where I just used to write proposals and it was a hassle-free job and again when I was in **** for my second child they said we leave it to you to work- whether you want work from home or work from office as long as you are able to take calls.”)

Training for Better Work Life Balance

Some organizations are proactively promoting work life balance by providing some training to the women executives. (72- “We are actually training and having courses specially for the women for two reasons. One is they carry a feeling of guilt when they come to work, so to overcome that guilt and to show
them that there is need for a balance in work and family, and the second thing is that they are not able to say no to their subordinates, that is also taught to them. The other thing is about how to communicate in order to maintain balance in the family that is because the family is not used to women going out to work. Today it is a little different... they are more progressive towards accepting women at work.”)

Intangible Organizational Support

Attitude of the Boss

The attitude of the superiors determines the confidence women executives have in achieving a better work life balance. It was expressed by many women executives that the bosses positive attitude and support helped them during the stressful periods of their work life conflicts. (06 –“...having a woman boss and transparent, pro-person organizational policies, helped a great deal.”), (10 - “Also the respect we got within our own company. . . . gives you the confidence. . . . . It’s how the leadership treats you.”) There are some women executives who feel that work life balance is easier when you have a male boss as compared to a female boss because they are less stressed on work life issues. (89- “Men are not bothered about what happens in the home front, they don’t get stressed on their home front so it doesn’t hamper your relationship with a man boss in certain manners, but with a woman boss her stressful days affect us, men’s stressful days at home generally don’t get so bluntly shown. I think that difference is certainly there.”)

Women at the very senior levels expressed that empowering oneself and creating a conducive work environment around oneself is easier once you reach the top. It is harder at the lower levels. (45- “I think there is also an advantage that when you reach at a fairly senior level you have more empowerment to do that, at a junior level I think the awareness and energy needed for doing what it takes is limited.”) Enablement of resources and stating your terms at work is necessary to achieve work life balance. This awareness or the confidence
to state it comes at higher levels in the organization. (45- “The other thing I think is definitely an area to work on for all of us in the organization is the enablement of resources that we can provide to improve productivity or efficiency of a high performer.”), (78- “We also have tried to give associates and people who need that kind of benefit in providing them with laptop, providing them with virtual private networks and everything to help them if they are in that kind of a situation where they need to balance their personal lives and work.”) It was also felt that senior levels can make it easier for other women in the organization by letting them know that they can ask for things that will help in better life balance. (45- “You know you are scheduling a call, why does the call always have to be at 6 o’clock in the evening because it is US time, it can be a US late night and early morning. . . . . . If I look at the root of work life balance, it is awareness.”)

In some cases women bosses have to take stringent steps on employees who struggle to balance work and life on an extended basis. This is usually done in the interest of the other employees.

(86- “You have to be balanced about it. I see whether this is a temporary issue or it is a permanent issue. If it is temporary, I would really like to help the person to tide over that - like the wife has to rush somewhere or husband has to rush somewhere on an emergency… whatever time it takes, 2 weeks, 1 month, 2 months ok!, but if it is more of a permanent type of problem, I would urge the person to address that problem in whichever way, based on his or her priorities. You cannot live a life when you are so unhappy. So that would be my advice to that person. I would actually force the person to take a decision because I also have a responsibility, or he/she also has a responsibility towards the organization and it is very difficult for a team to sustain a slightly weaker member. Unfortunately it is to some extent unfair on the rest of the team also if I allow it to go out of hand, so there are times where I force a decision saying that you have to decide because you are not being fair either the organization or to your personal life or your family.”

Work Culture
The attitude and the organizational culture can go a long way in retaining women in the work place. (71- “You found that your home life was suffering because of your growth in the organization so you stopped and then you thought ‘ok how can I work around this’ because this organization is important to me. I don’t want to move away from it and at the same time I need a balance. So at that point the companies can be very candid and clear and say sorry this is it!, but if organizations look at people as investments, investments in whom they have invested in and they have developed those people, and if they worked around these things, then women would not have to give up jobs.”)

Work culture and work timing influence the choice of organization for executive women.

(03- “I asked them (the organization, hiring me) ‘I would like to know what your timings are’……. there is a culture in some companies where they expect you to stay till 9 and 10. They said, ‘we are not like that if you are here 9 to 5 and do your job very well, its fine with us’. So I was very happy, that is why I stuck on there for about 13-14 years and it was very good for me.”)

(11- “I was very keen on being in an organization, which was quite flexible in terms of timings and also with the kind of people I work with.”)

(75- “We are trying to promote better work life balance- even in our office. We were told that all employees, especially ladies, must leave the premises by 6:30 – 7:00 pm.”)

(56- “When I chose my workplace, organization culture got a rating and then ability to have work life balance, because when I joined work I had a new born to care for.”)

(56- “I also think the work culture affects the choice of which organization to work for, because one of the other places I went to there was this HR manager who was in this small cubical and who was absolutely smoking like a chimney. Maybe it was because I had just come back from the US, I found that very insensitive. And it is probably just a personal thing- I get a headache whenever they smoke around me, so I felt if he is interviewing a manager or whatever and if he is behaving this way I don’t know how he will treat the rest of the people.”)
CHAPTER 4. WORK LIFE BALANCE

Role Models

Having a role model to emulate helps women to balance work life pressures. (89- “She is a remarkable person who has shown us it can be done, of course the house front has to be managed well, so looking at her I have tried to do it for my own self.”)

Individual Perception of Work Life Balance

The exact definition of what constitutes work life balance is defined by every individual based on their perception and their situation. (79- “I feel that I have a work life balance, but everybody around me feels that I give more priority to work, my family doesn’t feel that way but maybe people out here feel that. That is the most common comment for me. I do things only when I like to do it, it is not because it is mandated that I have to be at home or mandated that I have to be in office. There are days when I extend my work round the clock, I stay in office till the next day morning and there are days where I like come at 11 o’clock and just pack off at 4 o’clock. I do not know whether it is a part of the policy or not but so far my managers have allowed me to do it. They have left me to work my way.”)

4.5.3 Quantitative Findings

The survey of 90 women executives regarding work life support from various sources reveals the following.

On an average, women executives rate support from ‘hired help’ (6.20) and ‘family’(5.74) as the highest. Support from ‘bosses’ and ‘management’ is perceived lower than other supports, while support from ‘co workers’ is rated higher at 5.05 mean value. Figure 4.11

Among the various facilities offered in organization to promote work life balance, maternity benefits, flexi schedule and paternity benefits are availed in greater number of cases. Onsite child care and play school score the least. Figure 4.13

Work life balance is aided by the facilities given by organizations. However,
Figure 4.12: The average perception of the sources of support for work life balance

Figure 4.13: The average usage of organizational facilities
organizational facilities are neither provided nor used to the same degree. The sample size of women executives in each industry varies, so does their response in terms of the degree of opinion. The respondents were asked to rate the facilities in terms of satisfaction of usage, on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from (-3 to +3, where -3 meant ‘very dissatisfied’ and +3 refers to ‘very satisfied’).

Since the number of women executives in each industry also varies, the weighted mean scores were taken to facilitate a comparison - Figure 4.14. (Number of responses X degree of response/ total number of respondents in the industry)

Flexible work patterns enhance work life balance. The various forms of flexible work pattern include using offices in split locations, being in consultant position, sharing a position with a peer, flexible time schedule and compressed work week. Flexi time is used most (52.2%) preferred, and consultant position on a temporary basis is used next (35.6%). Paired or shared position seems to be the least used flexible work pattern (7.78%). Split location and compressed work week are found in IT industry and share an equal preference of (25.56%). Other than the preferred mode of flexible work pattern, respondents were also asked to express their opinion on the fact that flexible schedule has actually helped work life balance. About 33.8% of the women executives strongly agree that flexible work schedules are useful, while only 13% strongly disagree. Almost 71.5% are agreeable to the statement that flexible work schedules have improved
work life balance. 23.4% of the respondents do not feel so. See Figure 4.15.

Women executives prefer to spend their scarce spare time on family get-togethers and vacations. Hobbies, reading and physical fitness are form the next best pursuit while socialization scored the least. Refer to Figure 4.16.

The time spent at work and the requirement of relocation or travel is another factor, which affects the work life balance as shown in Figure 4.17. Time requirements vary in terms of the industry and designation. While 8 to 10 hours are spent at work by most women (60.84%) The analysis of the willingness to relocate shows that almost 1/3rd of the sample shows a willingness to relocate and a similar percentage is ambivalent. The proportion of women unwilling to relocate is also almost 1/3rd of the sample.
CHAPTER 4. WORK LIFE BALANCE

Figure 4.16: The activities that promote work life balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family get-togethers</td>
<td>6.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacations</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.17: The time spent at work and willingness to relocate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Spent</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-7 hrs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 hrs</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 hrs</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willingness</th>
<th>Number of Women Executives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maybe</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6. Situated Activity

The situated activity according to Layder’s model refers to the actual interaction that the actors have with their environment. It consists of the dynamic interaction among family members, the colleagues, subordinates and bosses at work place and the woman executive. It takes into account the particular behavior or action of the woman executive and its effect on the interaction with the actors in the work place and home. This dynamic of interaction creates a response and this response in turn affects the interaction.

4.6.1 Qualitative Findings

When asked about the impact of work life conflicts, women executives talk of the impact of career on their children. Considering the fact that motherhood is central to their role concept, this is not surprising. Spouse, inlaws, and parents are seen as supporting factors and children are seen as those affected by careers of their mothers.

Reaction from Children

There were some advantages cited by women executives when asked about the impact of being a working mother, on the children. Firstly they expressed that they learn to do different types of jobs at home (62- “The children started learning to do small things themselves, I used to make them cooperate with me, when I wash the vessels I don’t want them to go and break something else I will say you also do it, I will give them the vessel and if they keep it nicely stacked I always used to appreciate. Both of them, my sons, can manage the house all by themselves. Some days when I get delayed they used to tell me mummy if you are coming late I will keep the rice and dhal in the pressure cooker and then you
come to finish the rest.”) They also said that their children understand that they are a priority. (73- “I spend most of the time on the weekends only with the kids, they are able to understand that.”) (101- “They have to understand that the benefit actually goes to them.”) In a deeper sense, they said that the confidence of a working woman is what is passed to the children. (95- “I think they will be able to appreciate the fact that you are working. When you are working the confidence you have- that confidence is what you are instilling in the children, that is an advantage which we should acknowledge.”) Essentially, they conclude that children learn from who you are. They learn to be self reliant and achievement oriented. (105- “Smart mothers make their children smart too. One lady was saying her children have become more self reliant and actually make a cup of tea for their mother when she returns from work. And they have earned good ranks in studies too.”) (95- “However there is no substitute to the time spent with them especially in the early years and primary schooling. I teach my children I don’t send them for tuition that way I can have a control on them and I can sit with them till 11 o’clock. I have seen that cooking is done separately that is ok we can adjust, but this being together is a very important time maybe only till 6th standard we should sit with them. So being with children is very important. Work is something we have chosen and we have to do 100% too. It is no use cribbing that you have lot of work, we have chosen this and it is better do both with equal responsibility as well as love, for both and for anything we do, we should have a passion.”)

While reactions come from different quarters, women executives are most sensitive to their children. The reaction of children seems to have a defining influence on women who have to leave the children to go to work. If children express unhappiness it weighs on them and increases feeling of guilt and doubts in their commitment to their family. (83- “Yes, huge guilt factor, which I think every working mother lives with and everybody talks poorly about me as a mother and in my case I think my mother gave me a tougher time than even in-laws.”) When asked about the reaction of children to their being working mothers, it was expressed that children often respond to what they are habituated. (30-
“My children have always seen me as a very busy working mother and not just a working mother, so to them it makes no difference that I went to work or I travelled at a short notice for a few days, they hardly saw me at home. For them it is normal life, but whenever I would be with them I would be with them completely and they knew that they are my first priority so I had always communicated with them.”) In fact opting out of a career and being available for them for some time and then making a decision to go back to work can be more traumatic for the child who gets used to the presence of the mother according to women executives. (08- “It helps if you have been working throughout because I think then the child is used to the fact that you go out. I think it is very difficult, from what I see around from friends and families, if you have taken a break for a child and then you want to resume working. I think that is really tough because the child has got used to having you around, but if he is kind of seen you always as going out then I think it is a little easier. I am not saying he doesn’t throw tantrums it is just easier to deal with.”)

Women executives say that children need to know where their mother goes. A mental picture of the mother’s office and work space gives a feeling of security to them. (30- “Even at the age of one and a half years I have encouraged them to come to my workplace. So they would come and maybe spend 15 minutes in the office. They know where I sit. What my workplace looks like. Who my colleagues are. . . ”) Children also know and observe their mothers and can sense when they are interested in them. (10- “I had to really work hard and the children see that. I used to do things for them, like I used to come back from work and sit with the older one and make her study, sit with the younger one and make her study. . . .”)

The attitude of the child, they observe, changes with age. The women executives say that children’s needs vary and what they used to resent will be what they love at another age. (21- “I have seen my own son, he is 11 years and I would see when he was younger, he would be upset and say “mom come and pick me up from school” because everybody’s mother would pick their children up when he was in playschool. Today it is about my mom is a big person in
********, my mom does this, that evolution has happened. First of all, it is the pride associated with the mother being a career person, and who the mother is, the second is what career brings to the child, or the perks of a career mother—financial freedom means better holidays, better travel overseas, better quality of life.”) Changes and adjustment have to be made by mothers too when their children begin to grow and get independent in thought and living style. (28-
“Mental part is difficult as they are growing up, initially it was not, now is the time when I actually started facing the change. Now she is asking questions and she is having her own thing she doesn’t want to share some things, she wants to share some things. I don’t know how different it is if you are at home or you are not at home.”) As children grow their perception of what they want from you will also change.(66- “But now if I talk to my children and ask them, saying “I have not taken care of you at all let me stay at home.” They counter question saying “ what will you do at home, you will mess up, you can’t be a housewife at home so do what you can do well, it is better you continue to work.”). They need to be treated more as adults to keep channels of communication open. (28-
“I think what is important is once they cross that 10th standard kind of an age you need to tell them your problems. I think if you tell them what happened in office they will tell you what happened in school so that is a way you can talk and connect.”)

While it is universally acknowledged that the presence of the mother is crucial in the formative years, at later stages the presence of the mother may not ensure the perfect recipe for better upbringing for the child. A child needs a little space to grow, which may be smothered due to excessive attention of the mother. (58- “I have seen how cranky some of the kids whose mothers are always at home are because you are paying excess attention. There can always be arguments on both sides and I am not saying that what we are doing is right or somebody else is wrong, but having said that, I think there is what I would call formative years which are important.”) Executive mothers believe that their being career women does impact the children but they also feel that it can be worked around as there are advantages too.
The Work Life Tradeoffs (Career Vs Home)

The responses of women executives regarding the degree of importance given to family vis-a-vis career reveal different types of trade off decisions. While some give minimal importance to family, others give secondary importance to work and career. This leads to different actions in their effort to achieve work life balance. Central to this decision is their belief regarding marriage, commitment and motherhood. The reaction of children also determines the degree of trade off.

Career Vs Family Decisions

There are four types of coping strategies observed while trying to achieve the work life balance. The women executives who gave greater importance to family tended to drop out of a career completely or chose another line/career to balance home needs, while those women who are more particular about their career take minimum time off and use support systems extensively. Between these two categories are those who are willing to down trading a position or opting out for some time so as to balance home and work needs.

Dropping Out of a Job Completely

Those women, who consider the family needs as a priority, tend to opt out of the job. (09- ...family more important...) (05- “Most of them drop out somewhere around the way and that is why you are saying it is much tougher for a woman than a man because she has to manage the family, manage herself, kid and personal things, so many people drop out. . . .We still see a large number of women come into the workforce, but the drop out ratio is little high post children. There are women, who after two kids come back and work with same energy, drive, etc. . . . but you know reentry is not easy.”) The choice to drop out at higher levels is a conscious one and women do consider the costs of it. (19- “I know women who have said that I know I will not be able to do this, instead of accepting the job and making a mess of it better not to accept the job and be true to themselves. If they come up to a particular stage and then they are opting out- it is a conscious choice, it is not because you know somebody pushes them
to do something.”) It was felt that even women who are very particular about a career will drop out if pushed to an extremity. (82- “There are women who give extreme importance to their career, but I think that when they are pushed to some kind of extremity, they probably just drop out of a career. I guess a man would not probably quit his job to take care of his kid. I know so many of my women friends who took a break or changed lines to care for their kids.”)

The need to completely opt out may even surface later, when a woman executive has risen sufficiently in the organization and has fulfilled her career aspirations. At this stage life goals may take precedence over career goals. (18- “I know of women who quit, when their children are grown and are well settled, they are earning a lot and there is absolutely no need from a financial perspective and they would rather like to have their parents along with them, so they quit. That is another stage when one would look at quitting. At around 40-45, it is a different call.”)

Down Trading a Position

New positions require acclimatization and there is a need to prove one’s ability. When the home situations get more demanding some women executives prefer to refuse promotions and stick to familiar jobs. (16- “Being a woman there are enough milestones in your personal life, and you don’t want to take up the challenges on the work front in addition to it. So, when I was getting married and was adjusting to a new family environment and responsibilities, I did not want to have challenges at the work front too. I wanted to be in a position that I was familiar with....... then when I had my first kid, my mother was very unwell, she had cancer and so I needed to spend time with her.....again I did not want to take up something which is new, where I had to prove myself from scratch. So I think, it is situational. I did not want to prove myself.”)

Women as such consider the costs of pursuing a career above home and decide to down trade their position. (04- “You have to take a call. There could be some people, who might be capable of doing it, but they don’t go that extra mile because they feel that it will affect their health, or family. They may think it is not worth it.”) (93- “Do not think of dropping your baby in the creche,
first have the baby, understand how you feel, park all these ambitions, you can always find jobs. I am a woman who never pursued a career just for positions and advancements. Had I done that, I could have been 3 notches higher, but I am quite happy where I am.”

Choosing Another Line of Career to Adjust Home Needs

When their careers become too demanding, women executives may opt to pursue another career, which is less demanding. This openness of attitude, they believe, allows them to discover satisfying jobs that help in work life balance too. (69- “We were building our house so I had to stop everything and supervise the construction, so I took up a part time job in tourism, a cousin of mine had a travel agency and he said why don’t you just come and try this, I found it very interesting, travel is something I found that I had a real passion for . . . later I joined ****.”)

(71- “Actually my family was at a crucial stage because my son was just two and a half years old at the time when I took on this role, after spending about 6-7 years, I started dabbling in the area of training and I found that, it was something that I enjoyed and it allowed me to achieve a good balance of home and work as well! Currently I have a partner and together we formed a company that provides training in Customer Service Hospitality and Etiquette.”)

(84- “The reason I left my job was that I got married. The job that I had then was a 6-day week, with long hours. My husband was also in the hotel industry, so we would barely see each other, because we were both at different shifts and stuff. . . so that is when I quit and I joined a more ‘9 to 6’ sort of a job and it was 5-day week, so that gave me that space. But then, I think what it didn’t give me was that learning, fulfillment and the challenge, which I was craving for and that is when I joined ***** and I think it was a smart decision because this industry was just starting to come up, so I have seen it grow literally at that pace. I think it is really the sense of achievement, I guess, that keeps one going.”)

Opting Out for Some Time

The need to have a successful job and a happy home makes some women opt
for a middle path when they leave the job temporarily and join back after a short break. (10- “So you don’t want to have a successful job and then have a messed up home life so I kept a tab on that. We have to work on the balancing act even if we don’t do a great job on it.”) Some women take a temporary break and return to the career after that. They may also accept another less demanding job at that time. (02- “I left ***** organization mainly because I had a baby and I was expecting another, it was a 2 year gap. I didn’t want to take too much of load over there because ***** organization normally is performance-oriented. Since my babies were young, I didn’t want to get into any full-time job. I got myself associated with a NGO. I used to go for three days and timings were also flexible. I worked for 3 years before getting back to main stream”)

There are benefits of taking a break though it may mean a loss of career growth because it helps one to retain the enthusiasm for work. (02- “There is no need to give exaggerated importance to your career. If you are qualified you can always take a break. I feel it helps a lot because had I continued, (that is what I feel when I look back), working I might have got bored by now and I would have decided its over (Bus! hogaya!). This is not there now because I took a break. Now there is still some enthusiasm. If those breaks aren’t there, maybe had I continued with ***** organization, I might have been at a much senior level, because all my colleagues are now at a very very high level, thats ok!”)

When questioned about reentry, women executives said that it required hard work, (10- “When I came back to the *** organization, I had to start at the bottom of the pile and I really had to work hard to make it up.”) and a belief in oneself that one can do it. (18- “. . . There should be some level of confidence or acceptance or ability to do that.”) There was also an acceptance that one may not get the same growth as others since one opted for a break. (101- “If there was a flexible option it would be good but when you take 4 years off others have moved ahead and so they deserve to be ahead of you.”)
4.6.2 Quantitative Analysis

The online questionnaire was constructed by taking into account beliefs about work life balance, which were culled from an extensive literature survey. This was administered on 90 women executives who rated them on a seven point Likert scale. The 19 beliefs are given below and summarized in the figure 4.18 -

1. Work life balance is not important to me.
2. Work life balance involves a constant struggle.
3. Work life balance involves reconfiguring work and home demands.
4. Work life balance involves taking a break from work and reentering the workforce when family demands are met.
5. Work life balance is an impossible goal to achieve.
6. Work life balance involves either losing family happiness or success in career.
7. Home and family demands have/will hurt my career.
8. Family member input has/will aid(ed) my career.
9. Taking personal time off (e.g. maternity) has/will hurt my career.
10. Taking a break from work and reentering the workforce has/will hurt my career.
11. It is important for me to be single to achieve career success.
12. It is important for me to be childless to achieve career success.
13. It is necessary for me to delay having children to achieve career success.
14. It is necessary for me to get hired household help to achieve career success.
15. I chose my job/career to fulfill my professional goals.
Chapter 4. Work Life Balance

Figure 4.18: The beliefs about work life balance

(Note- The red crosses are negative statements the rest are positive statements)

16. I chose my job/career to accommodate family needs.

17. Family responsibilities are to be shared equally by both spouse.

18. Gender issues arise more at home than at work.

19. Organizations are not women-responsive in terms of work needs.

The responses were analyzed using factor analysis, a popularly used statistical tool in social research. Factor Analysis reduces a large number of factors into few factors or components based on the inter-variable correlations. It helps to disentangle a mass of variables with complex interrelationships while Principal Components Analysis (PCA) to reduce data without reducing the variability of the original data (DeCoster, 1998). A correlation matrix was created to initially extract important variables, using the SPSS package. Then the Principal Components Analysis was used to extract 7 components, which were rotated using an orthogonal rotation method- Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. The 7 factors had Eigen values > 1 and a cumulative variance of 74% after extracting the squared loadings of the factors. The seven components are designated as given below. The seven components drawn through factor analysis reveal seven types of work life beliefs, which women executives hold. They reveal the varieties in beliefs about how to achieve work life balance. Those that are absolutely ‘Pro family’, believe that family is a priority and they do not think that childlessness is important for a career. In fact they do not want to even delay child bearing for a career. Those that are ‘Pro career’ believe that home demands can be
managed through temporary breaks and stress can be dealt with by taking time off. They seem more self oriented and believe home does not hinder a career. The ‘Optimizers” acknowledge that work life balance requires reconfiguration of work and home demands. They believe it is possible to achieve it and that it is not a struggle. There are some women executives who give importance to quality time with family as a way to achieve a balance between home and work demands. They believe attending family functions and vacations with family create the understanding and bonding which helps to ease work life conflicts. Some women executives believe that hired help is what promotes work life balance. Those that have egalitarian beliefs regarding gender role, believe that family does help and so work life conflicts reduce. There is also a group of women executives who acknowledge that work life balance is important and temporary breaks in career with a reentry later is inevitable. Refer Table 4.4.

Thus the interaction between the actors and their situations creates different beliefs and actions. The self is construed within this situated activity.
4.7 Self

The last component of Layder’s model, the ‘Self’ deals with the individual’s perception of his/her self in terms of the situation faced. In this case the women executive’s perception regarding her situation and her way of dealing with them, defines her ‘self’. Her understanding of the psychological, physical issues that affect her and the response to these stresses in terms of mental and physical strategies she uses to cope with the stresses determines her self.

4.7.1 Qualitative Findings

The narrative of women executives reveal the impact of work life conflict, They speak of psychological and physical costs of work life conflicts and the way in which they cope with them

Psychological and Physiological Impact

The narrative of women executives show that work life pressures manifests as stress, guilt, emotional compromises and a lack of time for themselves.

Stress

One of the manifestations of work life balance pressure is stress. This pressure is partly determined by the external demands on the individual at work and at home (75- “The in-laws. To make them understand is more important than anything else, so even if the children are upset it doesn’t add to your stress level as much but if the in-laws are upset then it adds tremendous amount of stress.”), and partly by their own psychological expectations from themselves. One is the need to be a perfect home maker with every thing in order, (75- “I am worried that my house is not spick-and-span so as soon I reach then I start cleaning and then I get irritated with myself because I have so much work to do and I am physically tired.”) and the other is ambition. (10- “If you are very ambitious, and you want to taste success too fast you cannot cope, and if you are mentally satisfied and confident, then only you can cope with it.”) Stress can cause burn outs and prevent women from conceiving. (10- “You can’t con-
ceive early, because you are not relaxed.”) (25- “I also think that the burn out will happen faster as we go ahead, you will have people burning out by the time they are 35-40.”)

**Guilt Trips**

Another important cost of the work life balance that women say they pay, is guilt. Women suffer from the nagging suspicion that they have not done enough for their children. (24- “The challenge around work life balance is that, you are not able to spend time with your family, you are not able to be there when your children need you, so you start having guilt and you are trying to kill yourself doing everything.”) This is especially acute when there is not an adequate support system to help them. (05- “Without that support system women will find it very difficult to juggle and I have seen many brilliant, competent women opt out because they can’t face this. You know when they are in office they are on a guilt trip at home and when they leave early they are on a guilt trip about the office, so it becomes very difficult. I think the ability to balance these, the ability to be able to manage these well is what a woman requires to be successful, which men don’t have to do.”) The guilt factor further accentuates with criticism from family members who may not approve of working mothers. (83- “Yes, huge guilt factor, I think every working mother lives with it. Everybody talks poorly about me as a mother and in my case, I think my mother gave me a tougher time than my in-laws.”)

Respondents also explained ways and means to handle it. Firstly they said there was a need to acknowledge and address it. (08- “...frankly address it.”) Then a positive effort to get out of guilt should be made. (20- “... get out of guilt and assert yourself to get an effective work life balance.”) One way is to do one’s best for the family and at work and then let go of guilt. (26- “I would say that you should not feel guilty about whatever you have not done. You must think that you have done your best within the circumstances and to the organization also you need to do the best. You should not feel that I should do everything at home, I should do everything at office...you should let go of something in the family and say that ok this is what I can do, I draw a line and
there is absolutely no point in feeling guilty about it.”)

(37-“I think the number one thing is not to feel guilty, it is perfectly OK and I think you could give your 100% to everything, you know, it is not a choice of and/or. I think for a longtime when I had my children I kind of battled with that, I felt like if I was working I was compromising my kids and if I was not working I was compromising myself, then I said it doesn’t have to be that way, I could be great with both things as long as I draw my limits and I know I won’t compromise. So when I come home I switch my cell phone off for 3 hours and I am only with my children and I find in that much time I am able to give them a lot of satisfaction, they are very happy, they know what their mom stands for and that the other part is also important for them and today children are so perceptive, I mean with the 8 year old I am having these conversations about look this is important to mom and when you grow up you should be independent too and she really respects that.”)

Women executives feel that observing other women who have handled the guilt issue or those who have chosen one at the cost of another will help in deciding the limits of what one can handle. (23- “It is something that we have to work on, look at role models of successful women because they are few of those and also the ones you see have paid a price, heavy price on their personal life and then draw your line.”). See the positive effects of being a working mother. (51- “I feel that working women’s kids are much more independent and they become self sufficient.”) Some suggest the use of organizational facilities like a creche’ so that you can look up on your child more often. (52- “A mother always likes to have her child nearby where she can go and keep an eye on what is happening, the emotion behind this guilt factor is the fear that you are neglecting the child, if you keep your child close by, you go and peep in now and again, or maybe give the child its lunch, you feel you are not neglecting the child because at home also that is exactly what you would have done.”) It is also felt that older members of the family have a better influence on the child than first time mothers. (83- “I think I was very lucky, my child’s pediatrician is a very old doctor, she was in her 60s and she was almost like a foster mother or a
foster mother-in-law to me and she said that I needed to look after myself more, that kids had a lot of resilience and so long as they were in safe arms—meaning mother and grandmothers, both sides of grandmothers are much safer than us, first time mothers who wouldn’t know how to react to the child!”)

**Competitiveness and Negative Energy**

Workplaces have a great degree of competition. And when a woman competes in this atmosphere she becomes competitive too. (23- “When you compete on an equal footing with men then you can’t keep saying I am a woman I need to go home and nobody is going to be kind to you, people are too competitive nowadays.”) A competitive attitude at work can generate a lot of negative energy, which can vitiate home. (10 - “You have to learn how to not be over competitive in the environment, the moment you do, it comes out with a lot of negative energy, and you take that energy home, you take it out on your family. I just refuse to do that. It may sound very sound simplistic but that is the attitude I adopt.”)

**Emotional Compromises**

When women cannot handle the pressure of work life balance, they begin to compromise. (23- “It is definitely coming with a price . . . . and women are emotionally involved, so they do end up compromising. So it (the struggle to achieve work life balance) is much larger than just that woman itself . . . ”) Personal time and aspiration is perhaps the most common casualty of this struggle. (52- “We probably overwork both ends, so the time we spend on ourselves personally, suffers. You might have had a wish list- to grow, or to do many other things, but the ‘work’ and the ‘home’ both take up a lot of your energy, and probably 95% of your time.”) (35- “At the managerial level, you need to be available most of the time, and then it just expands. In between, you also do what it takes to manage your domestic situation, home, dependence, people, your responsibilities, so probably what suffers is your own personal aspirations.”) The loss of personal time can be expensive as it will lead to a certain feeling of existential angst. (19- “One more important thing to me, which I am grappling with is that I feel every women should also have time for herself because you have given your time
to office, given the time to your home, to your children, to your spouse and so on and so forth and then you will see that at the end of the day all these are all passing phases.”)

**Time Crunch**

Most women executives express that time is the scarcest commodity. This is because managerial functions are time consuming and unpredictable. (19- “...it doesn't work out because you may say - ok I am going to leave at 5, it doesn't work out. Many of your meetings may actually happen in the evening and you can't just say that no I am not going to take any meetings or any kind of gatherings in the evening, so one has to try to enforce a little bit of discipline. One has to be able to say to oneself this is all I can do and plan it out very clearly otherwise you will see that time just flies away! So one has to have a good understanding of time and how to schedule it.”)

(91- “I have consciously made time for myself. If you do not have any time for yourself then somewhere down the line you get sucked in this crazy world where at one point of time you are completely lost, you really don't know where you are, where you started, where you are going, it is like day in and day out it is the same thing over and over again. So I definitely do make time for myself, evenings when I am with my daughter I take time to do exercise wherein I can do stuff with her, mornings I do my yoga, meditation or whatever. You have to have your balance somewhere down the line you need some space for yourself to breathe.”

**Physiological Issues**

**Health** The awareness that physical health can be easily lost due to over stretching oneself is high among the respondents. They also described the measures they undertake to preserve their health and relax their mind. (47- “The point that we should not miss out is that it is the woman who is taking the brunt of it. We think that there is a support system and that it will enable us to make the best of both worlds, but the truth is that it is not only a physical exertion, it is the mental, emotional exertion and it is the fact that most of the time our brain is over working that will take a toll on our health.”) While women executives
admit that devoting time to them selves is tough, they also say that one must work on it like a job. (70- “It is very tough, . . . , I am trying to get organized, I am losing my health in all this.”) (17- “It is like a job, you have to actively focus on it, you can’t think that somebody else will take care of it. The fact that you are conscious of it and working towards it and spend time and effort on it is what will give you the desired results and I think that is important and lot of people tend to neglect themselves and think it is the last thing one should do . . . ”) The measures used by women executives to maintain health are-

**Diet** - Eating the right kind of food at the right time (08- “I am very conscious about my health that is priority for me, I kind of try and make sure my diet is correct.”) (33- “…eating in time.”)

**Sleep** - Sleep is often sacrificed for achieving tasks in time. So sleep needs to be prioritized. (41- “I think for women sleep is the biggest challenge, or at least personally for me the thing that gets compromised in all of this is my sleep.”), (08- “I try not to lose on sleep so I lose on things, which I would have done if I had more time, for instance I don’t watch movies, I probably watch movie a year. I literally watch no television.”)

**Exercise** – Physical exercise helps not only to maintain good health but also keeps the mind active.(35- “Now I balance because it has become a necessity I need to take some time off to do some physical activity. So I spend at least half an hour to 45 minutes a day walking or the treadmill.”), (17- “I try to fiercely protect a work life balance so whether it is work in the morning or gym in the evening or weekend. I find that it has a direct spin off on your mind, the moment you are kind of feeling healthy, your mind is also active, and you can’t dissociate one from the other.”)

**Discipline**- The greatest challenge is to do all this consistently. So a degree of self-discipline is essential to get results. (17- “There is a tendency to do it in fits and starts whereas you should have that discipline whether it is your diet or exercise.”)

**Recreation**- Different activities and socializing helps in resting the body and mind.(30- “Just give yourself those few hours of rest, just go and chill,
do whatever you enjoy—go play a game, go watch a film, be with friends, visit family, whatever you want because your system requires rest. If you don’t give it the rest it won’t show now, but you will see that it has affected your health.”

**Laze**—Permitting oneself to laze can also rejuvenate the body and mind. (35—“I am a little lazy after work because I just like to relax mentally and watch TV programs I think you don’t have to focus or use your brains.”)

**Use the Gym at the Work Place**—Organizations do provide facilities to work out, especially in the IT industry. These need to be used. (53—“We have gyms, we have facilities and you make sure you do this stress buster in between your work. You have that kind of flexibility in the IT industry. If my work demands that I have to be here for V.Con at 8:30 in the night in between I can go for a gym session or walk or something and then come back. These possibilities are acceptable and encouraged.”)

**Mental Relaxation**—It is necessary to consciously lower ambition, slow down and live, so as to achieve a better work life balance. (10—“You should take a call within yourself, be calm take something that is a little slow because you can always makeup at a later time, don’t feel that this is my opportunity and if I don’t do this I will be left behind, don’t be over ambitious.”)

**Pursue Hobbies**—Hobbies are abandoned when work pressure coupled with demands from home increase. What one likes is abandoned to suit the interest of the family. (08—“I am a music fan so would I catch up a lot of MTV or I would catch up a lot of some discovery travel and living and that kind of stuff, which I just kind of gave up because I think I would rather sleep. I end up watching programs which I can watch with my son, which he is interested in, and that is the kind of priorities you end up making.”) Some women executives avidly pursue their hobbies to recreate zest in their lives. (17—“... music, photography, painting, acts as a stress buster...”) Pursuing hobbies helps in restoring the balance. (43—“I think we are like pressure cookers, your whistle will go off and you put it off. If you don’t know how to do that as an individual on a regular, daily, weekly basis you will burn out. So, I will put on the television and will watch ‘friends’ or I will pick up a book that I have really wanted to read and...
will make sure I read it cover to cover and when we go on holiday, I refuse to do anything else but holiday with my family.”)

Personal factors

The upbringing, the way goals are defined and the personality traits affect the way work life balance is defined or sought.

**Upbringing**- (42-“I think a lot depends on the way you have been brought up or the atmosphere in which you have grown up. I think that plays a very crucial role in how you define work life balance.”), (47- “the way you are brought up, the city culture in which you live, affect your decisions to eat out or cook at home, use a maid or a creche...”)

**Goals**- Respondents feel that goals need to be redefined to achieve work life balance. (17- “I think it is also about finding joy in the small things and if you can do that you will be fine. At least may be in some of my roles I could touch so many peoples’ lives... and that is a very satisfying feeling.”)

**Traits**- People have specific traits, which make them choose particular careers and the tradeoff between work and home. A respondent narrated the following incident.

(16- “We have group sessions and training session where they evaluate your character. We found to our utter surprise that everyone from Investment Banking had a very similar profile, that we were all overtly ambitious, we wanted recognition from our clients, from the workplace and achievement was very high. The family was always consciously or subconsciously put as the secondary thing where the family was supposed to adjust to our work life. There is an overwhelming love for the work that gave people high satisfaction. And only if you are that type of person you will survive. Since you love your work so much, the family has to work around you. This is our basic nature. There are different kinds of people, there are some people who enjoy wanting to be in family. The point is that this is not a career for them, they should look at some other career option.”)


**Determination**- Work life balance requires mental resolution to achieve it. It also presupposes clarity about ones goals. (37 - “I think that if you are determined and clear that you do want to do this and you don’t want to compromise on anything, you kind of figure out ways.”) When commitment exists, it will express itself at work and at home. (18- “This commitment issue is probably not restricted to work alone, if one is committed I believe one will be committed at work and on the home front as well.”)

**Coping Strategies**

Coping strategies are determined by individuals in cultural contexts. Culturally, Asian women perceive work life balance and coping strategies to be an individual effort as compared to their western counterparts and this is largely due to gender socialization (Chandra, 2012). Individually, their role definitions, personality and beliefs affect the coping strategy they adopt. Women tend to define themselves by their relationships more than their accomplishments (Rosner, 1990) and so the social, organizational and personal relationships impact their perception of themselves and the stress they feel in managing different roles. The responses of women executives mainly speak of attitudes and actions that are personal in nature. They are less about the need to change external situations. While a few specific actions are spelt out to manage home and career, most of them concentrate on managing oneself. However the subtle motivations that elicit specific coping actions are of greater value. Actions are situation specific, but motivations are similar across diverse groups of women. The underlying theme of empowerment is discernible through the narratives of the interviewed women executives. Refer to Figure 4.19.

**Psychological Self Empowerment (The Action of Being)**

Personal and psychological empowerment is one of the underlying themes in the narratives of women executives. They seem to think that work life balance is achieved through internal clarity about what one desires in life. They believe it requires introspection, and a positive attitude. (40- “As long as I am clear that
4.7. SELF

Figure 4.19: The coping strategies used by women executives to handle work life conflict

Determination - Work life balance requires the mental resolution to achieve it. It also presupposes clarity about one’s goals. (37 - “I think once you are determined and once you are clear that you do want to do this and you don’t want to compromise on anything, you kind of figure out ways.”) When commitment exists, it will express itself at work and at home. (18 - “This commitment issue is probably not restricted to work alone, if one is committed I believe one will be committed at work and on the home front as well.”)

4.7.3 COPING STRATEGIES

Coping strategies are informed by individual and cultural contexts. Culturally, Asian women perceive work life balance and coping strategies to be an individual effort as compared to the western counterparts and this is largely due to gender socialization (Chandra, 2012). Individually, their role definitions, personality and beliefs affect the coping strategy they adopt. Women tend to define themselves by their relationships more than their accomplishments (Rosner, 1990) and so the social, organizational and personal relationships impact their perception of themselves and the stress they feel in managing different roles. The responses of women executives mainly speak of attitudes and actions that are personal in nature. They are less about the need to change external situations. While a few specific actions are spelt out to manage home and career, most of them concentrate on managing oneself. However the subtle motivations that elicit specific coping actions are of greater value. Actions are situation specific, but motivations are similar across diverse groups of women. The underlying theme of empowerment is discernible through the narratives of the interviewed women executives.

my world constitutes of both these elements – work and family, and that I need to be successful on both the fronts, then I can plan my jobs.”) Clarity is achieved by introspecting and finding out what one really wants. (100- “I sat down and mentally aligned myself to the situation and understood that I need to be clear where I want to be, what is non-negotiable for me regarding my family, and what is it that I am going to compromise on. Then it is a question of juggling all the jobs, but I am very clear that I am doing it because I want this and I have no regrets.”) Clarity is necessary because every decision or action has a price to pay. (100- “I think there is a price you pay for every decision you make. So you want to be a super mom, super wife, super everything, then there are some things that have to be given up.”) Clarity helps to define what needs to be done. One must then arrange the support systems needed to achieve one’s goals. Clarity precedes every major decision in life, including marriage. (93- “You must be very clear when you marry. Marry the man who will allow you to pursue what you want to pursue.”) Clarity is achieved through rigorous introspection. It helps to think objectively, get right perspectives and balance emotions. (45 – “Do you have a pocket of time, which is your time and which helps you think and reflect
on questions like- what did I do well? What is bothering me today? What can I do about it? I think, ever since that pocket happened in my calendar there has been a huge difference. I think for a woman, it is important to be connected with her own self.”) A fulfilled woman can be a good mother and a good wife. The tendency to see the need for a career as a selfish desire is common especially in a country where the culture believes that a woman’s life is meant exclusively for the service of her family. (48- “Don’t think you are in a career because of a selfish interest. A woman in a career helps the entire family and generation, not just the individual.”) It is important to feel self-worth and take pride in one’s own achievements. (54- “Take pride in saying that I am a successful woman.”)

Positive attitude, women executives assert, is essential to battle the odds at work or at home. They list basic qualities like self-confidence, (12- “...have faith and confidence in your own self. It is a mental setup and it helps you in making decisions.”) flexibility, a willingness to work hard (77-“Work very hard, there is no substitute to hard work. Equip yourself with the latest gadgets. Be flexible in your mind”). Some women take some extreme measures too! (41-“I remember taking my breast pump to conferences and finding a room to pump milk and give it to the child. I know of career women who are in consulting and they freeze breast milk and they FedEx it across to their child! So a lot depends on the attitude.”) They also state the dangers of having a closed attitude and how not looking at options and possibilities is one more way of losing out on the work life balance. (45-“I opt out of team outings, which happen late evening so I don’t get to be visible. I am only a name on email and I don’t get to meet and interact with the three levels above my boss. The whole team plans to go for an outing and my first thought process is how to opt out. By default, I am opting out. Now you can do many things, you can say ‘guys by the time we clock out it is going to be 9:30, I am going to join, and can we start early?’ or ‘I am going to join for a cup of drink and I will exit by 07:30’. All these are possibilities that we don’t look at. We don’t consider them and we think ‘it is not done’, ‘others are not doing it’, etc. Our own perceptions play these things up.”)

Managing every role perfectly, handling the guilt associated with role am-
bivalence and struggling to find the energy required to finish the tasks associated with the dual role, is identified as the hardest personal challenge in work life balance, by women executives. To want everything to be perfectly done at home and at work is an unrealistic demand on oneself, they acknowledge. (11- “... just stop being too perfect.”), (37- “I decided that I wasn’t going to be a super heroine, doing everything.”), (92- “You need not be obsessive about doing things in time.”), (93- “Learn to let go, you can’t be controlling everything.”) Work life conflict it is not an issue of individual inability but a universal problem for all working mothers. Sharing helps to handle personal guilt in a better manner. (83- “Nothing takes care of personal guilt you may feel as a mother, so I think we need a little bit more of sharing of experiences and helping each other to go through these tough curves.”) Knowing one’s own energy level and managing it is an important skill, especially when certain jobs require greater attention. (45- “I think people don’t think about it in the lines of managing energy as such. They don’t ask- when is my high time? When is my low time? Am I aligning my toughest tasks to my high time?”).

The long continuance of social and physical deprivation has affected the development of women in India. The constant emphasis on women’s dependent role, her need to sacrifice and nurture others at the cost of herself, increases her sense of low self-worth (Claes, 1999). Though most of the women in middle and upper middle class strata have overcome many barriers that women in India still face, their self-confidence is not as much as men (Char, 2000). Besides at work, when a woman executive is constantly measured by a yard stick determined by men, the sense of loss of self can be more acutely felt (Zanetti, 2002). The subtle internalization of this deprivation that reflects as low confidence could be one of the motives reflected in the coping strategies elucidated by the women executives.

Redefining Roles at Home and at Work (The Action of Relating)

Externally women executives have to redefine their roles within the family and at work, to achieve work life balance. The role as a mother and as an executive has to be made explicit to family members and the expectations at
work must be clarified. (48- “...setting some right expectations both in the workplace and at home.”), (53- “Have an internal clarity and then negotiate for what it takes both at work and at home.”) Women executives suggest many methods to achieve this. The ability to say “No! This is all I can do” is a skill to be learnt. (36- “We have to actually learn to say ‘No’. I will do whatever I can till X amount of time and after that, it is my space, it is my time. The ability to exercise this option of saying no is a very important thing, and it takes a long time to learn.”)

Planning is an important part of managing work and life. (91- “Even if you have the support systems in place, you really have to plan.”) Nevertheless the best of plans can go awry due to some unforeseen situation. So having backup plans is necessary to avoid tensions. (04- “You have to have a backup plan for your home and for your office. I think that is very critical otherwise the amount of tension, the amount of stress that you will have is too much.”) Pressure on the home front increases when there are younger children at home. The interviewees gave the following tips to handle demands from children. To handle the tasks involved at home, the most quoted coping strategy is multi-tasking. (98- “I used get up at 5 o’clock to drive them (children) to school, I used to walk in the school while they played cricket; then come pack the bags, pack the lunch, give them breakfast, get them organized and send them off to school again.”). In terms of raising children, the women executives reiterate the need to spend quality time with children. Children require not merely physical care but also emotional and psychological attention. The executive mothers describe how they spend quality time with their children. Lending children a listening ear, they feel is an important way of paying attention. They feel it is easy to be so preoccupied with work so as to stop listening to children. They say that children can sense withdrawal and they slowly stop confiding in their parents. (81- “Make sure that whatever time you spend with the children, you listen to them because they need to speak to you. When you are always busy and preoccupied, you are not letting them talk to you.”)

Quality time means one should be present in terms of attention given. (08-
“There are lots of mothers, who will be at home, but they will be on the phone or on the internet. I literally make sure I am giving him (my child) 100% of my time when I am with him.”) Attention and space, both are needed for the balanced development of a child. Excess of anything is bad. However striking the right balance is difficult. (54- “As long as you are able to give attention to the child, they can manage. They should also get some space for themselves. Many people don’t do that. They either get obsessed with work and ignore the children or get obsessed with children and don’t let them live their life. It can be claustrophobic for the children also. I think striking the right balance makes the difference.”) Having a ‘connection’ with the child is important. One way to do this is to involve them in activities. (03- “I used to spend my free time with my daughter and we had different ways of connecting... I used to involve my daughter in my activities.”) Keeping phone contact with your child is an effective way of being aware of how things are with them. (28- “Once my kid leaves school and reaches the daycare, I speak to her find out what she has eaten and what has happened in school...”) (06- “Whenever I see her call, unless I am interacting with the client, I definitely take her calls.”) Dependability creates trust in a family. Children must know that they come above everything in their parents’ life. (75- “When my children were growing up they knew that they always came first. So now they are willing to let me also have my own independence.”)

Certain responsibilities and jobs cannot be delegated. It is necessary to distinguish these responsibilities. Also one must learn to focus on the task at hand. (44- “Your child is born to you, and being a good parent is a duty you cannot delegate. Similarly, if there are elders at home, for instance, I have a mother-in-law and I spend time with her, for at least 3-4 hours a day. I am in-charge and I need to take care of her, so that is the priority. The important thing is the time that you spend either at office or at home has to be dedicated.”) Managing relationships with the spouse and the extended family (in laws) is also mentioned as an important factor in work life balancing. This adjustment must be preceded by an understanding of these expectations which is necessary to
effectively fulfill them. (44- “Understand your family and what they expect from you, because ultimately you are making money or whatever only to be happy and share your joy with your family, with your friends, and with your community. If you are clear in your mind as to what that expectation is and you can meet it in a fair way. . . . of course there are unfair expectations from families too, which on the personal front one has to decide what to do, but largely the expectations are fair.”)

The next task is to communicate and negotiate with others. Women sometimes feel hesitant to ask or express their requirements. They must overcome such inhibitions and negotiate with others. (53- “Sometimes, home issues do have an overriding priority over work issues or vice versa. If you can negotiate with your boss saying this time I need to go for a doctor’s visit for my family or I need to take care of the examinations or whatever- ask for it. Don’t feel guilty about negotiating.”) Communicating with one’s family helps to set expectations. (75- “I told my mother-in-law very clearly ‘Mother, I cannot do this! I can do one thing perfectly and right now I am doing my career perfectly, so yes my house might be little untidy, I cannot be perfect like how you are in your house, I am like this and you have to accept me with all my faults.’ She also thought about it, and we now have an agreement on that.”)

According to women executives, a long term career plan must be made to accommodate family needs in the beginning. Sacrifice of certain career moves in favour of the family should be done in the initial stages. Women executives feel that this gives a message to loved ones that the family is important. Later the family provides willing support when women executives actually begin to focus on a career. (52- “Your compromise should favor your family rather than your work. Let the people around you, let your children get the feeling that you are available and that for you the family is the most important thing. Make one or two very obvious sacrifices which the entire family and relatives know about. I did that, I resigned my job in stockholding and came here. That was a big thing because I left a very senior position. So people know that you have done it for them and something in them is satisfied. It is very, very important
to take your family with you in the initial stages and make them comfortable. Take your time because you are not in a hurry...... you have got 26 years of career and a lot can be done in that.”)

Use external help when you can get it, especially for repetitive, mundane tasks. (81- “Whatever help you can get -like a cook or a maid, you should definitely get that because you need to make sure that you have time to spend with your kids. Prioritize and delegate other things.”)(63- “Hire somebody trustworthy. For that you need a network through ,which you can find reliable help.”)

Studies report that childlessness and remaining single is promoted by structural and situational constraints at work place and home (Wood & Newton, 2006; J. O’Neil, 2004). This is however not found to be true in the present study. Of the 105 women executives interviewed, 85 are married, 15 are single and 1 is divorced, (4 refused to volunteer personal information). This could be so because in India women face a certain amount of social and familial resistance and censure if they choose to be single or childless. Breaking through traditional expectations of a woman’s role is done when they choose demanding careers and executive positions, so they often have to negotiate their other social roles with the extended families (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010). Women in India are no longer seeking careers just to augment family income, but with a need to achieve a sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction (Singh, 1994). Though both work and home related factors affect the work life balance (Naithani, 2010), they feel that achieving work life balance is their personal responsibility. After achieving a degree of internal clarity, women executives feel redefining roles is necessary to achieve work life balance. The motivation behind this coping strategy is mainly the need to preserve the family relationships and the career.

**Drawing Boundary Lines (The Action of Doing)**

The theme of creating distinctions and drawing boundary lines between self, work and home appears continuously in the narrative of women executives. They say that having excessive expectations from others or oneself can add stress. An objective and realistic perception of others expectations from oneself
will help immensely. (93-“If your own need for attention is high, and you are married . . . you go home expecting that your husband will understand a bad day at work, and you expect him to give you a hug . . . the typical Indian husband is the last man to give you that. Let us accept it. This is because he is not even aware that you need that hug!”) Certain attitudes and skills are necessary to maintain the work life balance. Primary among them is the skill to prioritize. This skill requires the ability to shift mentally from one sphere to another. It forms the basis on which time is distributed through the day. (08, 42& 03 - “Depending on what your priorities are, distribute your time.”) It also helps to decide which activities to avoid and which to retain. (10- “You usually cut down on housekeeping, socializing, and reading and give importance to work, kids and sleep.”) Thus the process of prioritizing includes deciding the priorities, determining the important tasks required, and finally focusing without distractions. (21- “Firstly prioritize your life, just be aware that you can’t do them all, secondly decide what you want to do and be very clear and, the third is self-discipline and an indifference to the external reactions.”)

The women executives identify some actions and approaches that aid this process. Setting up schedules to catch up with household chores, family outings, or even personal time is necessary. These schedules should be followed up in action too. (75- “To my mind this is a work life balance technique- it is all about slotting time and making the family understand it.”) There have to be mental boundaries to the amount of time and energy one should devote to work or home. This needs to be followed with an ability to relinquish control. (82- “I guess you just need to draw lines, from the work point of view. You probably should know at what level you should stop and when you should delegate, so that you will have time for yourself. You have to do that letting go.”) Work and home have different problems and one must cultivate the ability to separate the two.

Work tensions must not enter home and vice-versa. The inability to do this will eventually affect the person’s physical and psychological health. (05- “I am saying if you want to compete in the professional arena, once you come into
the office you have to forget your home. Once you go home you should try and forget the office. You should be able to shift. Many people don’t manage to do this and find themselves in a big struggle. One of two things happens then, either they remain where they are or they ultimately quit.”) The mental shift is difficult to achieve. Mood spillovers can ruin relationships at work or at home. To work effectively this ability to turn off the worries and anxieties is necessary. (91- “More than the physical stamina, it is the mental coping that is difficult. So a degree of prioritization is necessary. Mental balance is necessary in order to approach work of any type in a sane way. Carryovers create ripple effects and can ruin the day of others too. This attitude does not come easily and needs practice. You need to switch off before you start the next work.”) These mental shifts require strength of mind. (72- “You have to build your mental strength to such an extent that you can do it.”) At work or at home, what matters is not the amount of time spent but the quality of that time. Therefore what is important is the ability to confine thoughts to each sphere. (79- “Mentally confining the problems is necessary. It is not the time spent that matters, but the intensity.”) Some women executives did admit that they take work back home. (81- “We do take work back home-like when you check your emails in the middle of the night...”) They say that mental shifting takes time to learn and meanwhile one must make sure that one does not carry one’s bad temper from home to work or vice versa. (63- “Switching over is something you have to learn. All said and done you carry some amount of it in your mind, but try to get over it and do not show it on anyone.”)

Knowledge of certain facts helps in reducing the pressure of work life conflicts. One is that work life balance changes as children grow up and parents age. Work life needs are not constant. They change based on the degree of dependence the family has on the woman, or the stage of career that the woman executive is in. (13- “It basically depends on what priority you ascribe to it and that probably may change to some extent in the different phases of your life.”) The age of the child has a great influence on work life demands. Children need the mother more when they are younger and need more space when they are
older. (42- “I think actually we are least productive at work when the children are younger because the tensions are too many and they are completely dependent on us. It is much better when they grow older.”), (03- “As my daughter grew up I found more time for my own self and career.”), (51- “The kind of attention that they need throughout the life cycle differs from stage to stage.”) Refuting the argument that working women executives cannot give much personal attention to their children, an interviewee made a parallel to families in the past, and said that personal attention was always limited in large families. (51- “Just to tell you one aspect of how I have looked at it -in the earlier days people used to have 6 or 7 kids, so just calculate the amount of personal attention that each kid would get. What is the big deal of being at home; it is the same kind of personal attention that we give today.”) Also older children need their mother to be there in a different way. (51- “I think it is more that you should be approachable. They should be able to discuss anything and everything under the sun with you without feeling any fear. If you give them that comfort level I think they are fine.”)

Mental and physical prioritization, understanding situations and reacting after assessing it objectively are the primary motivations behind the coping strategies suggested by women executives. A senior women executive, who successfully managed her life and career has this to say to other women struggling with the same issues. (45- You can make this happen by teaching her how to fish you are not giving her the fish, giving it on a plate will make her life easy she will never make the psychological journey so I really feel that the approach is to provide the tools and let her (the woman executive) achieve it. Work life balance is really lot of that and the other thing is, if I look at the root of it, is awareness.)

4.7.2 Quantitative Findings

Self image about traits which they possess also gives an idea about how women executives see themselves. They see themselves as confident, emotional (as
Women executives were asked to rate the following statements on a seven point likert scale.

- My job gives me a sense of self worth.
- I work to supplement the family income.
- I avoid appearances of success.
- I am quintessentially the traditional wife.
- I am a mother first and a boss next.
- Being a woman makes me a better executive.
Figure 4.20: The average of the responses on self image given by women executives

An analysis of the responses to the questionnaire reveals that women executives report that their job gives them a high sense of self worth (4.20). They also think that being a woman makes them a better executive. They also say that their motivation to work is to supplement family income. Working women rated self images of ‘traditional wife’ and ‘appearance of success’ lower than the other beliefs. The image of mother first and boss next also received a high score.

4.8 Summary of Findings - Work Life Balance

The findings of the survey and interview of “Work-Life Balance” are summarized and discussed in this section. Layder’s model forms the overall premise of the discussion. The framework of Layder’s model helps to classify and understand the various factors that affect women executives and interrelation of these factors with their self. In the discussion chapter, Bourdieu’s theory and McNay’s ‘Performative Agency’ is used to gain insights into the interaction of the structure, agency and the reflexivity of women executives.
4.8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS - WORK LIFE BALANCE

4.8.1 Context

The context of Indian women seems to have been influenced by globalization, which has thrown up many employment opportunities. This coupled with the fact that education is becoming an important priority in Indian middle class families has created a pool of talent, which forms women as an important part. The demographic profile of the interview and survey sample seems to be in support of that observation in that 78% of 105 interviewed women executives and 70% of 90 respondents of the questionnaire, hold postgraduate or professional degrees. Tertiary education occupies importance in upwardly mobile Indian middle class. Education and modernization is also transforming the mindset of women in India in a significant manner. The conflict between cultural beliefs and changing identities of working women (in this case, executives) offers an interesting field to study their actions and reactions. Rama Bijapurkar, a well-known market consultant and director of many companies, in her book ‘We Are Like That Only’ speaks of the Indian way of adaptation, which integrates tradition and modernism in interesting ways. (Bijapurkar 2009). She believes that Indians have high cultural tenacity and are averse to completely discarding the socially approved practices. This is also evidenced in the narrative of women executives when they speak about marriage, family and motherhood. Essentially women executives define themselves in relation to their families. This is common in collectivist cultures but they also analytically reflect on the pros and cons of the traditional values and way of life. For example, with regards to joint family set up, they speak of arrangements wherein the extended family of in-laws or parents can be located in the same place but not in the same house. This satisfies the need for independence and privacy and yet provides the required support for both parties. They also emphasize on the need to pass on the family values to the next generation. The importance to marriage and motherhood, which is also a traditional value, is evidenced in the demographic profile wherein, 75.56% of 90 women who answered the questionnaire and 82.86% of the interviewed women were married. Only 16% of the survey and 14% of the
interview sample were single and this number included those women who were young (below the age of) and indicated intentions of marrying in the near future. However there appears to be a rising need to individuate and the available career opportunities coalesce with the need to uphold traditional social values. So women executives are faced with a need to blend the two. In this process they challenge some socio-cultural beliefs, internalize some beliefs and reject the other beliefs. The analysis of the interview and questionnaire responses reveals the following:

The narrative reveals that women executives have internalized socio-cultural beliefs regarding marriage and motherhood. They speak of the larger role of women. They believe that marriage and motherhood is a conscious choice and is also fulfilling.

- They acknowledge the conflict created due to multiple roles of ‘executive’, ‘wife’, ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’. They speak of guilt and issues of personality change and admit it is difficult. But they also reiterate that it is a personal choice to have it all.

- They contest traditional notions by questioning the role of men in child rearing. They are also conscious of the degree of internalization of the social role definitions and the impact of social conditioning. However they also appreciate the subtle role diffusion taking place in the Indian society as men are increasingly participating in household chores and supporting their wives in their careers.

- The need for self-fulfillment and individuation appears in their narrative but they also speak with clarity about their Dharma and the priorities that their Dharmic roles create.

- The survey regarding the socio-cultural perceptions of women executives reveals that they are conscious of inequities in social roles in terms of responsibility at the home front, the devaluation of their contribution to society and the general lack of respect. However they have internalized
certain traditional views like the view that personal appearance and behavior are more important for women as compared to men.

- The role of an Indian woman as defined by epics covertly drives their sense of self-worth. Consequently, the fear that following a career makes them appear self-centered drives their perception of bias or general lack of respect.

- The fact that their conduct, appearance and behavior come under more spotlight as compared to men is mentioned with some concern by women executives. They also recognize that they have to play conflicting roles and the priority given to family is not accredited by society. This conscious acceptance indicates that women executives feel that respect to them in terms of their role is a basic issue to be addressed.

- Some traditional beliefs are totally dismissed by women executives and this shows that there is a definite change in the perception of social beliefs. The traditional beliefs, which are rejected, include the belief that a woman’s place is at home while a man’s duty is to earn. A wife must have lower status than her husband and must earn lesser than him. Also the belief that increase in the number of women at work place will disrupt families in the long run was dismissed.

Thus education and employment have significantly impacted women executives in India, which enabled them to overcome certain old-fashioned beliefs and challenged some notions about their role or status in society. However some roles and beliefs are internalized and define their sense of self. The next layer to be explored is ‘setting’ or the closest atmosphere that impacts women executives.

4.8.2 Setting

Home and work place form part of the closest environment of women executives. They form the setting within which the women experience life conflicts.
Analysis of survey statistics and the narratives of the women executives reveal the following -

- Family is seen as an important support by women executives. The support by family takes the form of reducing the degree of emotional strain and guilt experienced by women executives who have children to be cared for. It helps to handle physical work and ensures supervision of maids. The family values are also given by grandparents to grandchildren. However women executives also reiterate that to maintain family connections, there is a need to nurture relationships through communication and compromise. In the survey, ‘help from family’ was rated as the second highest source of support. On an average, women executives rate support from ‘hired help’ (6.20) and ‘family’ (5.74) as the highest. Support from ‘bosses’ and ‘management’ is perceived lower than other supports, while support from ‘coworkers’ is rated higher at 5.05 mean values.

- Questions on how women executives perceived spousal support drew mixed opinions. While some women said that support from their husbands in the form physical help in parental and household duties, career related advice and emotional support helped them to pursue careers, some spoke of their husband’s attitude as a deterrent to their pursuing careers. They say that their spouses believe that parental duties and household management are a woman’s job and consequently do not help their wives. Besides they expect their wives to sacrifice their careers if needed. Women executives also admit that this social role conditioning among men is dependent on family upbringing. They feel even women make the role of the mother a part of their self-definition. They also acknowledge that the attitudes of men are changing over a period of time and men are sharing household duties.

- Hired help or external social support systems were also given a prominent position by women executives in work life balance. Hired help in terms of cooks, baby sitters, maids were rated as highest contributors to effective
work life balance in the survey, with an average score of (6.02). Women executives said that the maids sometimes were a part of the family and were indispensable. Some say that there are inherent problems associated with maids in terms of undesirable habits, and actions of maids which affect the children left under their care. Globalization has increased opportunities and desire for upward mobility among maids is depleting their availability. The need to maintain and value maids is emphasized by women executives.

- Organizations are seen as supportive of work life balance by women executives. Support is perceived in terms of tangible facilities offered by the organizations, while boss’s attitudes and work culture are seen as intangible factors that affect work life balance. The organizational facilities offered include creches, flexi time, work from home options, off site and on-site child care, reentry after a break, Sabatticals, part time jobs, alternate roles and training. Of the various facilities offered to women executives to facilitate work life balance, a few are used by them extensively. Survey reveals that the most popularly used facility is the flexible schedule, especially in the IT industry and services industry. Manufacturing and Automobile Industry use maternity and paternity benefit more. On-site child care is not preferred in all the industries except automobile where a mild preference is shown. Off-site playschool and child care too are not considered useful by women executives. Women executives explain the reasons behind their preferences. They cite distance of work place (in terms of commuting) and quality of daycare, as reasons which affect usage of these facilities. As executives they are also aware of the costs involved in offering these facilities and so they refer to the cost benefit analysis of facilities offered by the organization in their narratives. 71.5 % agree in varying degrees about effectiveness of flexi time facilities. They rate consulting positions second but the lowest score is given to shared positions as a way to reduce work life pressures. Compressed work times and split
location were given a modest score by women in IT industry, where these facilities are offered.

- Family get-togethers and vacations are the most preferred ways of taking a break from work. Fitness schedules and hobbies. 60.68% of the survey sample said that they spend 8-10 hours at work, 25.84% spend about 10-12 hours at work and about 7% spend more than 12 hours at work. Willingness to relocate is high (33.33% said yes and 32% said maybe), only 31% said a categorical no to relocation.

- Women executives say that work culture and attitudes affect work life balance. When organizations view employees as investment, the loyalty of employees and their eventual reentry into work is possible.

- Women executives feel that it is preferable to have female bosses while some prefer male bosses.

- Having a role model helps in handling stress of work life balance according to the respondents.

- Women feel they have greater control on their work environment when they are in higher positions and feel they can make a difference to those in lower levels by offering them the needed support.

4.8.3 Situated Activity

When asked about the impact of their career on family, women executives speak of the reaction of their children. The reaction of parents, spouse or in-laws is seldom mentioned. Women executives feel that children need the mother in the formative years and reiterate that family is their first priority. They feel that helping the child through school academics is an important task. They speak of guilt, when they cannot be there for their children in the early childhood period. However they also acknowledge that children learn to be independent and self-reliant, when their mother is not always available. They feel working affords
their children a better quality of life and makes them achievement oriented.

Depending on the degree of importance given to motherhood and career, working women make different trade-offs. The career decisions of women executives reveal four types tradeoff between career and home. Those that give family priority, completely drop out of a career to be with their children. Women executives say that work life issues are difficult to balance and certain situations on the home front can preempt this decision. Down trading a position is another trade off that woman executives use to handle work life pressure. New and higher positions are accompanied by the necessity to spend time and energy to learn the ropes, and this time and energy is not easily afforded. Some women change the very line of their business. This is done when they inadvertently discover their passion for another job which fits their schedule and does not affect their jobs at home. Some women consciously opt out to join careers in which better work life adjustment is possible. Another tradeoff used by women executives is a temporary layoff from work, till their home front can be managed. There are definite costs for such decisions in terms of promotions. Women executives are agreeable to these costs. Reentry can be stressful because, new skills have to be learnt, colleagues may move much higher in the organization and there may be some reactions from others because of the decision to take a break and reenter.

The factor analysis of the survey responses reveals that there is a variation in the way women executives approach the issue of work life balance. The seven beliefs distilled are ‘Pro Family belief’, ‘Optimizing belief’, ‘Quality time belief’, ‘Pro Career belief’, ‘Hired help dependency’, ‘Egalitarian belief’ and ‘Balancing belief’. Details of which are already discussed (pp.157-159).

4.8.4 Self

The self implies the way women executives see themselves. It includes their understanding of their own traits, the way they perceive the impact of work life conflict on their health, emotional stability and time. It also examines
the strategies they use to cope with the work life issues. The upbringing and
the personality traits impact the way in which work life conflicts are perceived
or dealt with. Women executives rate themselves as confident, emotional and
process oriented at work. They also believe that they have an adaptable way of
thinking, which can be holistic and linear. At work they are collaborative and
territorial. They also believe they are more inclusive than hierarchical. The
survey also reveals that women executives feel that their job gives them a high
sense of self-worth. They also think that being a woman makes them a better
executive. They admit that their motivation to work is to supplement family
income.

Working women rated self-images of ‘traditional wife’ and ‘appearance of
success’ lower than the other beliefs. The image of ‘mother first and boss next’
also received a high score. Women executives say that guilt about not being
able to give enough time for children is the biggest outcome of work life con-
flict. This is further accentuated when a support system is not adequate or
when family members criticize or disapprove them. Respondents feel there is a
need to acknowledge and address guilt by seeing the positive outcomes of being
a working mother and being realistic about what one can handle. Physical and
emotional stress is another factor, which appears in the narrative of women ex-
ecutives. Personal time is the first casualty of stress. It includes compromising
on sleep, personal hobbies and consequently, their health. There seems to be
a high degree of awareness concerning health and mental relaxations. Respon-
dents feel it is necessary to eat the right diet, have adequate hours of sleep,
pursue a hobby or read to mentally relax.

Coping strategies used by women executives speaks of empowerment. The
responses of women executives mainly speak of attitudes and actions that are
personal in nature. They report lesser about the need to change external situa-
tions. Their locus of control seems more internal with regards to the challenges
and issues involved in achieving work life balance. While a few specific actions
are spelt out to manage home and career, most of them concentrate on manag-
ing oneself. The underlying theme of empowerment is discernable through the
narratives of the interviewed women executives. They draw boundary lines of what they can emotionally or physically do and redefine their roles at home and at work.

The qualitative and quantitative findings layered in Layder’s model are again discussed in the 6th chapter to gain insights in the actual interaction of structure and agency. The context, the setting, and the situated activity, form the domain within which the self of women executives gets defined.