

Symposium Convener: Karen Korabik
A cross-cultural research project on the work-family interface: Preliminary findings
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Sources of non-institutional support and work-family conflict in India

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Social and Institutional context

- Indian society is characterized by
 - High in-group collectivism
 - High patriarchy and hierarchical relations in society
 - High gender inequality
- Women workers in the organized workforce constitute a very small section of the population.
- India represents a complex reality of competing images of modernity and tradition.

Institutional support for work and family

- LOW institutional support for balancing work and family within the Indian context.
- Institutional support takes the form of governmental policies that are progressive on paper but poorly implemented.
- There is very little explicit research focus on work and family issues.

Governmental and Organizational Policies

Notable legislations that impact work and family:

- Maternity Benefits Act (1961) 12 weeks paid leave for child birth.
- Factories Act (1948) - employer must provide a crèche where more than 30 women workers are employed with children below 6 years.
- Amendment to the Indian Penal Code (1869) Section 509 as per Vishakha case (Supreme Court) – To prevent and address sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

Governmental and Organizational Policies (contd.)

Pitfalls of legislative support:

- No national laws specifically covering rights to shared family responsibilities/ part-time workers/ home workers.
- Factories Act (1948) - prohibits women from being employed on the shop floor in heavy machinery- leading to low female employment in thrust areas of growth.
- By passing of legislation by organizations to circumvent laws.
- Lack of pressure for formal policies at the organizational level to support work and family.

Non-institutional support for work and family

- HIGH non-institutional and non-organizational sources of support for balancing work and family in the Indian context.

Based on focus group discussions with 35 married women mainly from upper middle class families in two cities of India – New Delhi and Mumbai; working full-time with public and private sector companies.

Sources of non-institutional support

- Spouse – depends on attitude of spouse (husband), nature of job, presence of other sources of support such as parents / in-laws and maid.
- Extended family – mainly in-laws / parents - depends on their availability, health, relationship with daughter-in-law(s) of the house and number of siblings sharing this support

Sources of non-institutional support (contd.)

- Paid help / maid – depends on reliability of maid, money that you can afford to pay, specific circumstances in maid's personal and extended family
- Self – depends on your own attitude, resourcefulness and willingness to deviate from the norms.
- Friends and neighbours – depends on how much you share in common with them and on whether they are located physically close to you.

Characteristics of non-institutional support

- Informal and ad hoc
- Bound in a web of reciprocal relationships of dependence and counter-dependence
- Long-drawn linkages between sources of support and their impact on work-family conflict of the individual.

Indian recipe for perfect work-life balance©

Ingredients:

1. Supportive spouse in a job that does not require frequent travel and has flexible work hours. 1
2. Supportive extended family members in reasonably good health available close at hand to help. 2 - 4
3. Reliable household help who can work without much supervision and is a quasi-family member 1 – 2
4. Cordial relations with neighbours and friends A pinch
5. Never-say-die attitude Large dose