

# CHAPTER 5

## 5

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Conclusion

Work-family conflict and coping strategies to reduce role conflict have been researched quite extensively in recent years. Several conclusions can be made from the review of literature in Chapter 2. First, one of the themes that seems to emerge throughout the literature regarding women with multiple roles is the competing demands on time and the ensuing role conflict. Most of these studies are based on the conflict perspective, which originates from the research on organizational stress by Kahn et al. (1964). The extent to which individuals can perform all the roles that he or she assumes is limited by time as well as his or her physical capacity. Work-family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict, which is the consequence of an individual's inability to meet the competing demands of both work and family roles.

Second, both work and family may be considered "greedy institutions" which place heavy demands on women. Assuming multiple roles may cause a woman to experience inter-role conflict and role overload, which may consequently result in psychological distress and physical exhaustion.

Third, the findings from these research point to the fact that women in general, more often than men, shoulder greater responsibilities with regard to household and childcare.

Fourth, conflict between work and family has a negative effect on job and life satisfaction. At the individual level, overload and stress may cause health problems and depression. Negative emotional spillover may be damaging to family relationships. At the organizational level, low motivation and poor health tend to reduce productivity. This may lead to a reduction in job satisfaction, which in turn might lead to an increase in absenteeism and turnover rates.

Fifth, support from work and non-work sources is positively correlated with a reduction in work-family conflict. Supervisors, colleagues, relatives, friends and spouse perform a central role in helping working women cope with the role conflict that they experience. The psychological well being of working women tends to increase when their spouses assist in childcare. Supportive supervisors and colleagues at the workplace help to lessen job stress. However, the number of family-friendly organizations with work environments that permit a balance or harmony between work and family is extremely small.

From the discussion in Chapter 3, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the participation of women in the labor force is still low. Most women are in low-paying, low-skilled occupations and very few women seem to be able to occupy the higher rungs of the corporate ladder (in the public as well as the private sectors). Efforts by the government to encourage more women to participate in the economy, has been quite successful.

Second, the education system in Malaysia has provided the opportunity for female students to receive education at the primary and secondary levels. The consequence of this is the keen competition between the sexes vying for the limited places in public universities. Female students have shown a greater preference for arts and humanities courses rather than technical, engineering, science and technology courses. Although in recent years, the enrolment of female students in universities has surpassed the male enrolment, the number of women enrolled in post-graduate programs has remained relatively low. Consequently, as more women receive education and training, more job opportunities are available to them.

Third, the number of regulated childcare centers is relatively small. In urban areas, a reasonably good quality childcare center may be unaffordable to many working parents. The most common reason cited by women who chose not to be employed was the problem of childcare. Many employers tend to view that childcare arrangement is an

employee's personal problem. Employers are not keen to set up crèches or childcare centers because of high start-up and operating costs.

Fourth, from the discussion in Chapter 4, it can be concluded that traditional sex-typing of roles are reinforced by society through cultural norms, attitudes as well as religious practices. The belief that maternal employment has an adverse effect on child development is still prevalent. Working women are believed to have relatively little time and energy to interact with their children, as compared to full-time, non-employed mothers. Most Malaysian men and women would prefer that women stayed at home and concentrated on the affairs of the home if their husbands were able to provide for the family. However, this should not be seen as merely a case of upholding the conservative, traditional views of marriage. The underlying reason might probably be the problem of childcare.

Fifth, recent developments and trends in tertiary education in Malaysia have profound effects on women academicians in public universities. Women academicians exist in a complex and demanding environment. Besides performing the tasks and responsibilities of the multi-faceted roles that they assume, they are also required to embrace technological developments in the field of education. Their job requirements now include, being sensitive to the changes that are taking place in higher education and undergoing regular training courses with the aim of upgrading their skills and competencies, so that they are able to use state-of-art teaching techniques and

methodologies. In this respect, there may be a possibility of some women academicians experiencing feelings of anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem or fear.

Sixth, women in academia face discrimination and are promoted much more slowly than male academicians. They continue to be significantly under-represented among senior faculty and top-level university management positions. Whether or not the constraints for these women academicians are institutional-based or self-imposed, top-level management positions in the university administration may appear to be elusive to many qualified and experienced women academicians. Male domination of top-level management positions in universities may serve to further reinforce "male-centric" culture and practices.

Seventh, married women academicians seem to struggle to maintain a balance between work and family life. Women academicians who become mothers early in their academic careers are faced with the competing demands of a new job and new family responsibilities. Although, there is often greater flexibility in academic positions than in other professions, there is also the 'open-ended' feature of many of the academic tasks. It is this academic culture, in which there is a blurred boundary between work, leisure and family, that poses a challenge to many women academicians.

In Chapter 4, the research findings found that women academicians working at the Program for Diploma Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur experienced moderate level of work-family conflict. With regard to social support received by these women academicians, they received the most support from their supervisors. Friends or relatives were the second most important source of social support, while colleagues or co-workers was the third most important source of social support. Women academicians received the least support from their husbands.

Finally, while there are economic benefits with regard to women's participation in the labor force, there are also problems. Some of these problems include the quality of parenting; the lack of affordable, good quality childcare; the problem of latchkey kids; difficulties in managing a diverse workforce as well as the dilemmas and conflicts of striking a balance between the professional and private lives of career women.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Women academicians are a university's assets. Organizational performance depends on the quality of its people. Among the key issues of managing human capital that the university administration should give due consideration to are workforce diversity as well as the establishment of people-friendly and family-friendly work environment. The university management should view work/family concerns as legitimate issues. The implementation of "Work/Life and Diversity Initiatives" could

help reduce work-family conflict among women academicians, subsequently leading to greater effectiveness and increased productivity among its female teaching staff.

Furthermore, work/life benefits and programs should not be viewed as an accommodation, but rather a strategic business initiative. Besides reducing work-family conflict among women, the advantages of creating a people-friendly work environment and a culture that supports work/life balance are:

- i. such a university can be said to have a set of progressive human resource policies,
- ii. it would become an employer of choice. In other words, the university would have a competitive advantage over other universities that do not have work/life initiatives and programs. Thus, it would be able to attract top-notch teaching staff and reduce the loss of intellectual capital, and
- iii. a people-friendly and family-friendly work environment will result in improved employee morale and increased organizational productivity.

Therefore, it would be extremely beneficial to the society in general and women academicians in particular, if a series of coordinated strategies are developed by the relevant institutions and agencies in the manner that could enhance both women's participation in the economy as well as the family institution. The university management, the government and its agencies, religious institutions and women



academicians themselves could contribute positively towards this end. As such, the following recommendations are made with these objectives in mind:

- i. to increase the social support received by women academicians both within and outside the workplace,
- ii. to help promote the participation and advancement of women in academia, and
- iii. to enhance the quality of life of women academicians.

#### **A. University Administration**

##### **I. Family Support Work Policies**

One of the ways of reducing work-family conflict among women academicians is to provide a work environment that will permit women academicians to successfully combine family and career responsibilities. Current policies, practices and organizational culture need to be re-examined to see whether or not they encourage family-friendly and people-friendly practices.

The university management should consider instituting policies and schedules, which are more flexible. "Flexibility of work policies and schedules" means making available alternatives such as: longer term leaves of absence, job-sharing, career breaks as well as temporary reductions in workload to care for a newborn, spouse, a parent or a child with a serious health condition or to deal with one's own serious health condition.

Child and other family-care needs of women academicians should be legitimate considerations in scheduling classes, meetings, in-service training and other work-related activities. The view that academicians who work long hours at the office as being 'committed, dedicated and hard-working', while others who do not are 'less productive', is forgetting the fact that, with the advent of technology, some portion of work can be done in the confines of the home.

## **II. Quality Childcare and Day Care Centers**

The dilemma facing many working mothers is how to be successful in both their careers and as a parent. Childcare remains a major problem for many women academicians. In order for women academicians to pursue their professional careers and participate equally with their male colleagues, it is essential that there be a more responsive environment at the university which allows women academicians to integrate work with family responsibilities. Hence, there is a need for childcare facilities (crèches and day care), which cater primarily for the care of infants, toddlers and pre-school children. The centers should also provide facilities for children who are not too seriously ill. The university could consider these three alternatives:

- i. provide subsidized on-campus care,
- ii. make cooperative agreements with other nearby employers to use their childcare facilities, or
- iii. make cooperative agreements with nearby privately-run childcare or day care centers.

In addition, a 'transit' or day care center could be set up to house children of the academic and administrative staff before or after school hours. It could be established on-campus or in the vicinity of the university with the cooperation of interested parties. The main aim of this day care center is to ensure that these children are well taken care of and supervised before or after school hours.

### **III. Training**

With rapid changes taking place in tertiary education and greater demands being placed upon women academicians, a higher level of conflict intensity and stress among women academicians can be expected. Among the aims of the following recommendations is to enhance women academicians' competencies so that they are better equipped to work under increasingly demanding work conditions.

#### **(a) Heads of Department**

As mentioned earlier, supervisor's support does help to reduce work-family conflict among women academicians. Thus, to enhance managerial effectiveness among supervisors, it is deemed necessary that they receive continuous training in the following areas: understanding of management concepts, situational leadership, situational sensitivity, interpersonal skills, communication skills, mentoring skills, performance appraisal skills, listening skills, counseling skills, problem-solving skills and work ethics. Emphasis should also be given to the management of work force diversity.

## **(b) Academicians**

In the long run, continuous training given to women academicians would result in improved instructional competence and a reduction in the level of role conflict. Workshops, seminars and courses should be developed with the following objectives in mind:

- i. to ensure the enhancement of instructional skills ,
- ii. to ensure that academicians are ready to face the challenges in designing courses that are of high quality and are responsive to industry needs, and
- iii. to ensure that they would be able to provide leadership in issues related to curriculum and pedagogy.

<sup>1</sup> There is a need to provide the necessary training and development courses for junior (1-3 years) and senior academic staff. A course on **Basic Instructional Skills** for junior academic staff should focus on the basic teaching skills. Women academicians would benefit from attending **Time Management Courses** aimed at helping them manage their time more effectively as they would be taught how to determine their priorities and use several time-management tools. Advanced courses for senior academicians to further enhance their instructional skills should include topics on facilitating active learning, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, evaluation and assessment, teaching-learning strategies and educational technology. Courses on teamwork, communication and leadership skills are also highly recommended.

Gibbs (1998) pointed out that new faculty members in the UK, Norway and Australasia are required to obtain a teaching certificate in higher education. Similarly, it would be an added advantage for all academicians in Malaysian public universities to have a *Certificate on Teaching in Higher Education*.

#### **IV. Increasing the Number of Women in Leadership Positions**

One important strategy in advancing the status and participation of women academicians is by ensuring that qualified women academicians are promoted into positions of leadership in the university. As more women occupy high-ranking or senior university positions, it is hoped that there would be greater commitment and support for a family-friendly environment in the university. The re-examination of promotion procedures in the various public universities is deemed necessary in order to gauge whether the elements of fairness and transparency have been incorporated in them.

In addition, the Human Resources Department of the university should clearly lay down the career development path of its teaching faculty. Succession Planning is strongly recommended to ensure that all employees, particularly women academicians who possess the potentials are groomed to assume positions of greater responsibility in the future.

## **B. The Government and Its Agencies**

### **I. Committee on Women Academicians**

As mention in earlier, among the inhibiting factors that impede women academicians from securing top-level senior management positions in institutions of higher education are inequality, discrimination and “glass ceiling” barriers. The following recommendation is aimed at reducing these barriers.

A Committee on Women Academicians should be established to learn more about family-friendly policies and practices from other international institutions of higher learning. Two major functions of this committee are: to ensure that there is a woman’s voice in the university administration and to promote effective action pertaining to pro-family or work/family balance policies. This committee should comprise prominent women academicians from the various universities as well as officials from the Education Ministry and the Public Services Department (PSD). Among the tasks that could be performed by this committee are:

- i. to collect information of leading universities which are committed to work/life balance initiatives,
- ii. to assess the existing policies, practices and corporate culture in universities against these best practices or benchmarks, and
- iii. to present ideas with regard to flexible work policies and schedules that encourage the integration of work and family responsibilities.

## **II. Monitoring of Staff Promotion**

To reduce male domination in leadership positions within public universities, the PSD could assume a more active role in promoting fairness and transparency. Hence, by providing specific guidelines on promotion and through the monitoring of staff promotion exercises carried out by universities, the PSD should be able to detect the presence of any irregularities and prescribe the necessary corrective action.

## **III. Incentives for Establishment of Childcare Facilities**

To complement the government's efforts in encouraging more women to participate in the economy, more and better incentives should be given to organizations which plan to set up crèches and day care centers. These may be in the form of allowance for tax deductions, a grant for the initial setting up (substantially more than the current amount), reduced assessment rates and subsidized fees on childcare courses conducted by the Welfare Department, Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

## **IV. Initiatives by Ministry of National Unity and Social Development**

There are social costs to be borne when both parents work and their children are left unsupervised or in the care of untrained care-providers. Much more could be done by the government to assist dual-earner families in the area of childcare.

**(a) Policy on Childcare**

Looking at the present unsatisfactory state of childcare services in Malaysia, it is deemed necessary that the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development propose a policy on childcare, which includes guidelines for the establishment of better quality childcare facilities at the workplace or in the vicinity of the home.

**(b) Community Childcare and Day Care Centers**

It would be of great benefit to the society as a whole, if the Ministry were able to establish Community Childcare and Day Care Centers in strategic places throughout the country to cater especially to the childcare needs of those in the low and middle-income families. Moreover, there is a strong demand for affordable and good childcare as well as day care centers, particularly in urban areas where the number of employed mothers is high.

**(c) Childcare Training Center**

From the discussion in the preceding paragraphs, it is essential that the Welfare Department in the National Unity and Social Development Ministry be allowed to assume a more prominent and proactive role. Hence, the setting up of a Childcare Training Center would be a step in the right direction. This center could conduct Certificate and Diploma level courses for childcare-givers and providers. A comprehensive curriculum, which covers several areas of specialization (e.g. children with disabilities and gifted children), should be designed with the help of child experts.



In addition, allowance and accommodation could be given to participants from low socio- economic background, single mothers, retrenched women and women who have retired from the public sector to encourage them to join the childcare or child-minding profession.

### **(c) One-Stop Center**

To reduce much of the bureaucratic red tape and expedite the setting up of childcare facilities by interested parties, a One-Stop Center needs to be established. The main objectives of establishing this One-Stop Center are to streamline procedures, to advice and to assist organizations as well as individuals who are interested in setting up childcare facilities (institutional or home-based). In this respect, the Center should liaise with the relevant divisions and units in the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development (i.e. Legal and Advocacy Division, Planning and Information Systems Division) as well as other government agencies so as to provide relevant and up-to date information.

## **V. Marriage Courses and Workshops**

### **(a) Extension of Course Duration**

Jabatan Agama Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) has made it mandatory for all Muslim couples in Malaysia attend a three-day pre-marital course. There are ten topics to be covered in this course and among them are: *Communication, Relationship, Conflict and Management* within the short period of three days. Marriage is a lifetime commitment.

The successful completion of this three-day pre-marital course does not however guarantee a blissful married life. For this course to be more effective, the duration should be extended from three days to several weekends. In this way, the topics could be discussed in greater detail, thus allowing participants to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the topics.

#### **(b) Revision of Course Content**

The importance of communication in a marriage cannot be over-emphasized. Many marriages have failed because of poor or lack of communication. Communication, interpersonal and conflict management skills cannot be learned in a few brief lectures. Topics on *Communication*, *Relationship* and *Conflict* would be more useful and meaningful if they were delivered by experts, such as marriage counselors and through workshops as opposed to the lecture method. The problems of dual-earner couples, work-family conflict, family-work conflict and coping strategies could be discussed in greater depth during the workshop sessions. The roles, duties and responsibilities of both partners need to be equally stressed. As discussed earlier, support received from husbands tends to reduce the role conflict experienced by working women. Thus, by exposing couples to the realities of married life, it is hoped that they would be better able to adjust to their new roles as well as form realistic expectations of their spouses.

## **VI. Parenting Courses**

Among the factors, which might contribute to role conflict among working women, is having to fulfill the responsibilities of the multiple roles assumed by them. Women seem to be doing most of the domestic tasks including household chores, child-caring and rearing. Many husbands fail to realize that the burden of raising a happy family lies on the shoulders of both parents, not just their wives.

Therefore, it seems necessary that the NFPB conduct a series of seminars or workshops as an awareness raising exercise and as a means of educating the public on the importance of parents having the necessary parenting knowledge and skills. The training modules should include topics such as: Child Development, Raising Adolescents, Parent-Adolescent Relationship and Conflicts, Effects of Marital Conflict on Children, Problems of Dual-Career Families and Coping Strategies, Child Abuse and Effects of Television Viewing/ Computer Games on Children.

Furthermore, with the help of extensive coverage and promotion by the mass media on the above issues, 'would-be' parents and parents would become more aware of their roles and responsibilities. Thus, it is hoped that they would be encouraged to attend these courses, workshops and seminars organized by the NFPB.

## C. Religious Institutions

### I. Role of the Mosque and Surau

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has not only brought about changes in the family system and lifestyle, but also changes in values, norms and attitudes in our society. The challenges and problems faced by parents in raising a truly Islamic family are monumental. The family unit bears the brunt of these changes. Without support from the community, it may be rather difficult for many educated mothers to join the workforce. Hence, to ensure the sustainability of the nation, the family institution needs to be strengthened and the well-being of all family members needs to be preserved. The society suffers if families are dysfunctional.

Mosques and *suraus* can play a bigger role in promoting positive universal values such as love, empathy, cooperation, respect and concern among its members. They should be more than just mere places of worship. As most mosques and *suraus* are under-utilized, it would greatly benefit the society if more activities, particularly for children and youths, were organized by these institutions. These activities may include social or volunteer work, tuition classes, indoor games, motivational and self-development workshops. However, this would not be possible without the commitment and active participation of the committee members of these mosques or *suraus* as well as the Muslim community. Most parents' minds would be put at ease if their children were participating in the programs conducted by these religious institutions (considered 'safe havens'), instead of loitering in shopping complexes after school hours. Thus, parents (working mothers, in particular) would be able to concentrate much better on their jobs.

## **D. The Individual**

### **I. Time for Self-Renewal**

One of the challenges of performing the multiple roles in which married career women assume is problem of reconciling the demands for time, energy and resources. In the process of finding ways to harmonize and balance the competing demands, these women might experience conflict and distress. As such, it is imperative that working women be mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually strong. They must set aside time to enhance their body, mind and spirit. Balance can only be achieved when there is constant self-renewal.

Undoubtedly, the greatest strength in confronting the challenges in life is to have faith in God. Having inner peace increases one's enthusiasm and optimism as well as helps to reduce tension, anxiety and conflicts. In addition, working women who are Muslims may embrace a more holistic approach towards life - "the sum total of all one's actions and deeds on earth will determine her placement in the Hereafter and a commendable deed is a ticket to eternal bliss." By upholding this unique guiding principle, these women would probably tend to have a more positive view of life and subsequently, acquire qualities such as patience, courage, resilience and contentment.

## 5.4 Concluding Remarks

The above recommendations are but a few suggestions that are deemed necessary to enable working women in general and women academicians in particular, integrate their careers with their family life and to some extent reduce work-family conflict. These recommendations focus around the strategies that could be taken by the university management, the government and its agencies, religious institutions as well as women themselves.

Supervisors and spouse are important sources of social support for women academicians. By enhancing their ability to help women academicians cope with role conflict, both supervisors and spouse are in fact assisting women academicians become more focused in their work and this in turn would lead to the overall improvement of the university. Work/life balance initiatives by management, a pro-family culture and a more supportive working environment would help lessen work-family conflict among women academicians as well as improve their quality of life.

The government has been quite successful in carrying out various strategies and programs aimed at increasing the number of women in the workforce. However, a planned and coordinated effort by the various government agencies is deemed necessary to ensure that women's participation in the economy is not at the expense of their families. Therefore, to complement the government's efforts, the establishment of

regulated, good quality and affordable childcare and day care facilities – on site or in the community must become a priority.

The proposed changes with regard to the duration and content of the pre-marital course for Muslim couples are deemed necessary so as to increase its effectiveness. Religious institutions, particularly mosques and *suraus* have a central role to play in the community. Unfortunately, they seem to have failed to realize this. In fact, these institutions could be mobilized to provide greater support to the Muslim community by being more sensitive to the needs of the community.

Finally, working women live in the midst of constant pressures and problems associated with the multiple roles they assume. In addition to the supportive network of colleagues, family and friends, working women need to have within themselves, a built-in system that serves as a 'fountain of motivation' – their source of strength. In order to lead a meaningful and balanced life, they need to engage in activities that could help them renew their energy. Positive synergy can only come about when the four spheres (spiritual, mental, physical and emotional) are constantly enhanced. Self-renewal brings peace, harmony, strength and optimism.