

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

This study focuses on the constraints faced by working women pursuing higher education, while still continuing to play multiple roles as wives, mothers, and employees. Most studies have shown that working women suffer from work-family conflict. This study has explored the dilemmas faced by these women who add another role, that is studies, to their pre-existing ones. The constraints affected their performance both at home and outside mainly in the work and study domain.

The constraints encountered by them can be classified as time-strained, capability-strained, and behaviour-strained. By time-strained, we mean the limited time within a day for tasks which require the attention as a worker, mother, and student. Capability-strained refers to the physical ability of the woman in caring for the family, managing a job and studies. This is typical of the 'burnt-out' syndrome. Behaviour-strained refers to the inability to focus upon the task at hand. Performing a task in one domain but attention frequently stray into another thereby creating undue tension and mental anguish. High expectation of performance in all roles by working women also contributes to this problem.

The study shows that the degree of constraints faced by the individual depends to a great extent on her personality and character. For example, the Malay informant, Maria did not face as much constraints in all three domains that is, work, family, and studies compared to the other two informants because of her natural relaxed attitude. Further, her belief that “God will take care of everything” releases her of much stress and tension. On the other hand, if the individual has high expectations, she is likely to endure more stress.

Besides, the gender role attitude, which results from social and traditional perceptions, continues to exert heavy toll on women. A working woman’s role in the family simply has not been assessed or evaluated. While society has progressed tremendously, the mindset of some men (and women) towards women’s gender roles remains traditional. This has resulted in working women having limited space and creativity to achieve their aims in life.

Cultural norms and values have also made a significant impact on these women. Eastern women usually try to play all the roles to the best of their ability. Therefore, they try to adjust and accommodate in all sorts of situations to achieve their goals. Although culture dictates the importance of being the perfect housewife and mother, these professional working women like my informants also desire higher education to better their future.

Inevitably, when these women are not able to cope, they seek help from their husbands. First, they hope for greater participation from their husbands in family matters. The positive sign of the changing trends in gender roles, particularly in terms of patriarchal dominance has contributed to more support and empathy for women pursuing careers and higher education in household chores. Now, husbands are more willing to share the nurturing of the children. In addition, we see the trend of employing foreign domestic maids to help in household chores. Having supportive extended families has contributed to reducing constraints.

Lastly, we see signs of successful role balancing among these women. Without realizing it, they have practiced better time management, compartmentalized roles, and they may even have lowered their expectations on certain matters.

5.2 IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The constraints faced by my informants are universal, faced by most professional working women. This can serve as a learning process to cope with constraints or stress for all working women, professional or non-professional. My informants can be classified as ambitious women who wish to achieve their goal of securing a higher degree. They are aware that the degree they earn will eventually bring them more prestige, higher income jobs and respect from society. The most gratifying aspect of this pursuit is the self-satisfaction of success, attained through sweat and tears.

The implication of this study is, it is imperative for women to understand the constraints and difficulties they will face in embarking on another role; in this case, a student's role. In addition, it will be necessary to make some adjustments before taking on the new additional role. Several rounds of discussions with their husbands were needed to gain their support and cooperation. The rewards, of course, in terms of extra financial contributions to the family will be the starting point of the discussions. Role sharing in household matters, childcare and education, and accepting the fact that these women would be less than perfect in their family roles.

Workplace is another domain that could help to reduce the stress of these working women. To make an arrangement with the management to have lesser workload during the duration of studies would be helpful. This would contribute more time for research in the library to ensure better academic results.

External resources like domestic helpers; nurseries and supportive relatives should also be pre-arranged before they take on an additional role.

5.3 SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In view of the constraints faced by professional working women and the impending changes in gender roles in modern society, it would be beneficial to further explore in areas like changes in life style of the professional working women turned student and her immediate family.

Basically, for a woman who undertakes an additional role as a student, her lifestyle and that of her husband and children would have to undergo a number of changes. It will inevitably change to accommodate the effects brought about by the new additional role. Future study can focus on the life style changes of husbands and children of the professional working women.

Since time-strained is one of the main constraints encountered, these professional working women will have to re-arrange their life styles by reducing social activities, like going for movies, chatting with neighbours, meeting up with friends, and so on. Social commitments of lesser importance like gatherings and events of distant relatives will have to be skipped or reduced. Thus, future research can be done on the selection processes of changes in life style of professional working women.

On the home front, an extra pair of hands to assist in household chores like washing, cleaning, and watering the plants is needed which has to be provided by their husbands. The education of children and checking on their homework will also have to be shared with their husbands. Thus, the identification of tasks for role sharing

between husbands and professional working women will be suitable for further exploration.

To summarize, further study into the above mentioned areas will shed some light on how professional working women can cope with their multiple roles. This improved understanding will spur changes in society to adjust and cater towards the needs of professional working women turned students.

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study has given an insight into the real life experiences of professional working women pursuing higher education as an additional role. The use of ethnographic methods data gathering revealed interesting facts about tense relationships, anger, frustrations, anxiety, and burnout; women have to undergo to achieve success.

By going through all these, the professional working woman will change immensely. She will be more mature in thought, a better time manager, and able to handle hardships and solve problems amicably.

Further, her husband and children will be more independent, and are less gender role stereotyped in their thinking. Therefore, coping and role adjustment is needed not only for the woman but the whole family.