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# Work-Life Balance Among Working Married Women: What Social Workers Need to Know

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG MARRIED WORKING WOMEN:  
WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS NEED TO KNOW

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Romyna Astrid Rendon

June 2016

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WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS NEED TO KNOW

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Romyna Astrid Rendon

June 2016

Approved by:

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Janet C. Chang, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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## ABSTRACT

This project explored the way working mothers cope with home, work, family demands as well as self-care. It mainly focused on the balance they have been able to achieve in their lives as working women, wife, and mothers. This study used qualitative research to examine the challenges these women face in their working and personal lives, the support systems they rely on to fulfill their multiple roles, and the strategies and coping skills they utilize to maintain work and family life balance.

This study used an interview format with a qualitative method based. In this approach, primarily open-ended questions were used. The major focus was to explore and then compared participants' responses to those questions. This method was chosen because it allows for a comparison of different experiences of a common topic

The challenges discussed by the working women included: (a) work schedule, (b) time constraints and (c) exhaustion. The participants relied on the following support systems to fulfill their multiple roles: (a) husbands, (b) grandparent and family, (c) co-workers, and (d) bosses. Finally, the strategies the working women used to achieve work/family balance included (a) planning, (c) faith, and (d) accepting limitations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was truly fortunate to have Dr. McCaslin as my faculty supervisor and Dr. Chang as my research coordinator. I am truly thankful for all the support, feedback, and guidance they provided me. I also want to thank my family and friends for being there for me during this period of my life!

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents and dear husband. To my parents for guiding me through my education all these years. For teaching me what's important and showing me through their example the importance of achieving goals and aiming to be a better human being. For always having faith that I could overcome the most difficult challenges and for staying by my side every step of the way.

To my husband who has always been there for me and has supported me throughout the development of this research and master program. For not letting me give up when things got challenging and for encouraging me to keep going through the obstacles. For being my shoulder to cry on, for all your words of encouragement when I was falling apart with so many transitions in our lives at the same time. Being your wife has been my biggest inspiration and blessing so I also dedicate this work to you.

I have been supported in so many ways from both my parents and my husband. Many have been the times where I lacked the strength to keep going, and is right there when my God picked me up. I will never get tired of saying "My strength comes from the Lord!".

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# CHAPTER ONE

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### Problem Statement

Working parents face many challenges each day such as caring for a sick child, getting involved with their children's school lives, helping them with their homework while meeting job demands and making sure of their well-being at all times. Dual career couples also experience the joy and satisfaction of raising children and participating in fulfilling roles in the workplace. The need to attain adequate balance with work and family life is essential to effectively function in each of these areas.

Even more dramatic has been the rise in labor force participation for mothers of infants and toddlers. In 1965, 21% of mothers of infants and toddlers were employed; by 1994, that number increased to 59%. In 1999, nearly a third of the employed women in the U.S. workforce had children under age 13; 38% had children under age 18 (Hickey, 1999). According to the Work and Families Institute, only 17% of families reflect the "traditional" stay-at-home mother and wage-earning father (Bond et al., 1997)

Working mothers continue to struggle with finding the balance needed to deal and handle the demands of both work life and home life (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008); (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012), making the topic of work/life balance significant for many women who are constantly facing these struggles.

While research has shown that there are significant expenses associated with the consequences of uncontrolled job stress (APA, 2014), such as less employee engagement, decreased productivity, and higher voluntary turnover (Conlin, 2006), many organizations realize that there are things they can do to address this challenge. Grawitch, Trares, and Kohler (2007) cited five critical elements that could benefit workplace wellness, and explored the relationship of each with employee satisfaction. The five elements are the following: health aspect, employee appreciation, safety, growth and development for employees, and work/life balance.

The literature has shown that organizations could provide flexible work schedules as a primary stress prevention strategy. According to Watts (2009), this work/life balance approach allows more control and autonomy for the worker as they have greater flexibility to work according to the needs of their life, not just the needs of the organization. Organizations are starting to focus on the implementation of flexible work programs for women in particular, as working mothers seem to have a higher level of stress related to the demands of balancing work and parenthood (Abdel-Wahab, 2007).

Noor's study (as cited in Levy, 2012) explains that work-life balance often involves issues with family, working time, welfare, social security, leisure time, and the list goes on. This study explored trends such as migration, aging and fertility. It focused on work-life balance and its relationship with family situations, personal inconveniences as well as the individual's well-being. The

study referred to the individual's perception of work-life balance. The impact of the size of the family, life plans, the structure of the household, system roles were also analyzed.

Research of the demographic and economic evolution of the American workforce has shown that professional working mothers show a present a unique perspective on explain what the modern workplace is like for them position (Statham, Miller, & Mauksch, 1998). Gender roles in our society associated with work and family in the last fifty years are some of the factors mentioned. Duxbury (as cited in Lonetti, 2012) reports that the number of women in the professional world keeps growing for many factors such as the demand in the workplace for professional employees, the fact that more and more women are hired in positions of power. It is more known that work-family conflict directly affects the health of working professionals as well as their families and organizations.

These factors show the dynamics among work and family. When there is a good relationship between work and family, then we can say work-life balance has been achieved. When this is not the case, then we call it work-family conflict (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Carlson, Gyzwacz, & Zivnuska, 2009; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Cinamon, 2006; Voydanoff, 2005; Winslow, 2005).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to have a better and deeper understanding of the work-life balance among married working women. This study was designed to explore the lives of working mothers and create awareness of what social workers need to know about this topic. For the past forty years, this alarming increase of working mothers has created a very unique but now predictable lifestyle. Many of these women have career of their own. This study explored the lives of mothers who are also working as professionals. The information shared by the women in the study assisted in the understanding of this complex and increasingly common lifestyle. It also identified the issues and impacts women experience in balancing work and home responsibilities. The purpose of the study was also to understand what strategies women use to manage internal and external stressors because motherhood places additional demands both physically and emotionally on women.

The positive and negative aspects of the lives of mothers working at a professional level will help shed light on the issues, dilemmas, and joys that go along with this role combination. A qualitative interview format was used in this study so that various aspects of the working mother's life could be explored and examined. To develop this study, qualitative research methodology was used to examine the lives of eight married working mothers. Participants consisted of mothers who work at least three days per week and have at least



one child between ages two and twelve years old. Participation was designed exclusively for mothers of young children, twelve-years old being the oldest.

The vast majority of studies about working mothers have used a quantitative methodology. The potential benefits of the proposed study include increasing understanding of the role of a working mother, the burdens that exist in their lives and the positive and negative aspects of the lives of working mothers. Increasing understanding in this area is essential. This study aimed to view the world directly through the experiences of these women rather than through statistics and anecdotes.

The expectations women have of the roles of their spouses and the impact these expectations have on relationships at home are discussed, and choices and the cost (consequences) of the choices women make when they commit to full-time jobs are also identified in this study.

### Significance of the Study

Social work practice might be enhanced by becoming more aware of the challenges married working women face to achieve work-life balance in today's society. Also, because the psychological state of a mother can impact her children, findings from this study can increase awareness of the effects that behavior can have on one's children. The study results should also be of interest to other professionals, such as social workers and therapists to understand more in depth the struggles and difficulties working mothers go through while trying to find balance in their lives. This study focused on the

research questions shown below to provide answers to the stated purposes of the study.

### Research Questions

1. What challenges married working mothers encounter when balancing work and family life?
2. What types of support systems do they perceive to be helpful to them in achieving balance in work and family life?
3. What strategies do they rely on in order to balance work and family life?

This study was developed to have a better understanding of women fulfilling the role of a wife, mother, and employee. The objective of this study was also to provide useful strategies for married working women to fulfill successfully family duties and be productive in the workplace. Work/family impacts women creating conflict that eventually ends in job and life dissatisfaction (Perrewe & Hochwater, 2001) and can have “deleterious effects on individuals” (Ensher, Murphy, Sullivan, & Delano, 2002, p. 116). These effects range from shortened lifespan, family marital disagreement, leisure dissatisfaction, depression, substance abuse, burnout, low job commitment and multiple absences.

Furthermore, given the increasing pressure and demands placed on working mothers, balancing a work and a personal life is very challenging and stressful for many women. Women are more likely to feel empowered if they

know which strategies to implement in order to balance work and family life. By learning about these strategies from women who have succeeded, future generations of women may have an equal opportunity to achieve the same.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Work/family balance is an issue that has become an area of interest because women are pursuing jobs and careers while having families. The purpose of this chapter explored the literature related to how women balance their lives with the responsibilities from both work and family. Balancing job demands and household tasks, including household and childcare demands, has been documented as a huge barrier that prevents women from achieving work-life balance. By investigating the challenges women face, the strategies they implement, and the support systems they utilize, future working women mothers can better understand how to balance work and family life.

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Amstead (2015) explains that according to social role theory, societal expectations say women must succeed in their professional and personal lives. Professional women who are mothers face the challenge of meeting the demands of both work and home; however, this is not easy to achieve as most of the time they don't have the time to fulfill appropriately each role. Gender roles have become stereotypes because they are embedded in societal beliefs. The author concluded that gender stereotypes appeared to be the cause of many of the barriers women face in their work settings.

Armstead (2015) also talks about the different theories that can be applied to this topic. According to the author, self-determination theory is built upon the idea of understanding the motivations behind human behavior. Throughout time, self-determination theory has been beneficial in teaching about health behaviors as well as understanding the way social behaviors work such as volunteering and the way it impacts work and stress.

When self-determination theory was put together with the topic of work/life balance, close to 90 articles were located in the literature. However, most focused on a dimension of the work/life balance model. There were some articles in the literature that based their research on work/life balance within the foundations of self-determination theory. One study explored understanding of the effects of passion and work/life thoughts have on work satisfaction. Thorgren, Wincent, and Siren (2013) used the self-determination theory to support their ideas on the types of motivation that individuals develop over time. The researchers explained that whether the development of pleasant or obsessive passion is mostly based on the way individuals internalize this actions into their own self-concept. This study focused on developing theory by relating the passion approach with work/life conflict. The findings revealed that a pleasant passion had positive effects on work satisfaction, while obsessive passion had the opposite effect. Researchers concluded that obsessive passion is more likely to result in an

unbalanced focus on work roles, and therefore, may cause conflict with other roles in life.

Another theory mentioned is social construction theory. This rooted in the humanistic perspective. A well-known psychological model, the humanistic perspective places an emphasis on an individual's phenomenal world and their capacity for making rational decisions (APA, 2013). It is said that people grasp how they see and appraise themselves as a result of the constructs that form their social reality (Waterman, 2013).

Kamenou (2008) is one of the very few studies found in recent literature that offered a specific view of how the work/life balance debate could be embedded within a social constructionist framework. In this study, the theoretical framework acknowledged an interaction between structure (organizational and family structures), culture (organizational culture and social culture including things like ethnicity, religion, language, and dress), and agency (participants' strategies and personal determination).

### Literature Review

Haslam et al. (2015) reports findings on the challenges working mothers endure and what they consider as their main support systems. Discussions were developed through the use of a semi-structured interview format, which included questions such as: "What are the challenges working parents face? What are the benefits of being a parent who works? Does working as a parent have effects on their employments? Do

parents who work experience effects on their parenting? What makes people attend support programs for parents?” (p. 2465). Results of these questions showed that most participants (94%) reported that balancing work family demands was hard for them. Eighty-one percent of the participants stated that support programs for working parents are needed and would help them achieve balance. This research provided eight themes which were: “the effects of guilt as well as the effects of work on family life, their support systems, their balance, parenting roles, career effects, the wellbeing of their relationship and last but not least the need for support programs” (p. 2463). Participants reported having a hard time getting out of their worker’s mode once they were home, which in the end had a negative impact on the interaction with their children. Mothers on this research also expressed having a hard time disengaging from work issues while being at home mainly due to the expectations that were put on them at work. Also, mothers reported that technological advancements were the main reason for conflict on boundaries between family time and work demands. They stated not having enough personal time due to the long list of duties on their daily routine, which in the end had negative effects on their relationship with their families, especially their children and spouses.

A study done by Crowley and Kolenikov (2014) used a total of eight-hundred over-the-phone surveys with a sample of mothers who lived across the United States. The questions they were asked included topics of

workplace flexibility. To meet the criteria for this research, participants had to be mothers, stepmothers, or guardians of at least 18 years old, with at least one child at home. Findings of this research reported that most women who had a partner at home experienced less stress and less of a negative impact to their careers compared to those without a partner at home. This study concluded that having a partner as support greatly reduced the risk of experiencing negative career effects by 50.6 percent. The study concluded in supporting the hypothesis that mothers with partners experienced less stress at home and work.

Crowley and Kolenikov (2014) also showed in their study that the control mothers had on their time-off was significant and relevant to their perceptions of work and parenting demands. This finding supported another research conducted by Crowley and Weiner (as cited in Crowley and Kolenikov, 2014), in which mother's control on their time-off flexibility was considered extremely important. When participants were asked to design an ideal job, they reported that time-off options were more important than having flexibility to work arrangements.

As reported by Armstead (2015) the balance of work and life among women has focused on the needs and the experiences of working mothers. While without a doubt more women have entered the workforce in largely male-dominated industries in past years, research shows that women are still



primarily accountable for most of the domestic labor in families and childcare (Tang & Cousins, 2005). Strazdins and Broom (2004) supported this thought by saying that the emotional work needed in families in women correlates with their increased responsibilities in the workplace. Similarly, in a study of Australian workers in the public sector, Connell (2005) found that most women who work outside home are also responsible for the household duties. Having these two big tasks requires them to be able to maintain balance between home and work in order for them to live fulfilled lives. Connell went on to explain the main difference in the work/life balance requirements for men and women by stating that “Dropping dead from career-driven stress, or shriveling emotionally from never seeing one’s children, is a different issue from exhaustion because of the double shift, or not getting promotion because of career interruptions” (p. 378). In support of Connell’s perspective, other research (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2011) has clearly indicated that the process of balancing work and family life can be physically, psychologically, and personally draining for women. Smithson and Stokoe (2005) shared this concept by admitting that work/life balance prevails as a main concern among working mothers with young children.

Levy’s (2012) master research provided a summary of studies associated with work-life balance. In her study, Marks and Macdermid (as cited in Levy, 2012) claimed that women who have good balance in their roles as mothers experience higher levels of wellbeing. The study showed that

those who were more balanced in their lives were not necessarily the ones who worked the fewest hours. The amount of hours women worked were not dictators of self-esteem, and depression levels.

Pichler (as cited in Levy, 2012) who studied factors in the areas of work and home demands found that women with children ages three to five and children ages six to eleven reported not achieving balance in their lives. Mothers with children under the age of three had achieved more work-life balance than mothers without children under twelve living in the household. The choices, struggles and frustrations that many women face include the burdens that comes with having job outside home, for example, dealing with difficult work decisions is one of those burdens.

Career/family conflicts are a crucial source of stress for working mothers. A comparative study done on British and French women (Hantrais, 1990), emphasized the importance to these women on being available for their children as much as possible. The price paid was the lack of personal time and the feelings of guilt if any free time was not used to be with their children. Most women studied stated that they would sacrifice their own free time and reduce the amount of sleep they had so that their children did not feel the adverse effects of having a working mother.

Hoff and Mitchell (2008) found a sad true in my opinion. They found that men tend to be more likely to be able to balance work and home life because the societal expectations place the burden of domestic duties and parenting

mostly on women. Even though there is research that states that balance between work and family may be unachievable, there are stories of women leaders who are successfully balancing home and work responsibilities.

According to Marshall (2009), professional women reported personal benefits, such as the ability to enrich the lives of and be able to provide for their children. These women also experienced personal gratification for making their children proud. Marshall (2009) also identified the professional advantages of having a career. The women in the study reported loving their careers because it taught them to be more understanding, compassionate, and sensitive, and in the end making them better mothers. They explained that having a career was important for these women because they were making a positive impact on society by helping others. In short, these women loved being mothers and professionals. Even though there is no a magic way to find balance, the women in this study reported that they were able to fulfill their roles as professionals and mothers. Their answers included being able to prioritize, make sacrifices, and compromise as well as being able also to embrace their love for their careers and families by believing in themselves and knowing their strengths and abilities.

### Conclusion

This chapter addressed the issues experienced by working married mothers attempting to balance work and home responsibilities and the impact of their choices to work full-time outside the home. It was also explained the

importance for these women to have mentors in their lives. In a study by Wrushen and Sherman (2008), women reported having a hard time finding a mentor to confide in or talk to about their professional and personal aspirations

Overall, it has been understood that women have to find ways to cope better with stress. The support by their workplaces would be one way for women to find their path to work-life balance. Because women must make sacrifices if they choose to work outside their homes, being able to balance work and family responsibilities is important; therefore, a movement towards success for both at home and in the workplace is necessary.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion and description of the participants chosen for the study, as well as an overview of the research design, data analysis, data collection, instrument and procedures. The purpose of this study was to examine how married working women balance work and family life as well as explore the issues and impact they experience.

This chapter also focused on the research methodology employed to define these women's experiences. This chapter consists of several sections which address the specific research design and methodology used in examining the lives of working mothers. The sections which follow include: (a) Study Design, (b) Sampling, (c) Data Collection and Instruments, (d) Procedures, and (e) Data Analysis. In addition, information on the procedures followed for the protection of human subjects are explained.

#### Study Design

Exploring the lives of married working mothers and how they balance their busy lives was the main objective of this study. The information shared by the women in the study assisted in the understanding of this complex lifestyle.

The positive and negative aspects of the lives of mothers working will help bring light on the issues, dilemmas, and joys that accompany this role combination. A qualitative methodology was used in this study so that several aspects of the working mother's life may be explored and examined. The participants in the study were encouraged to discuss their lifestyle as a working mother who will lead to an insightful discussion of the experiences of these women. This study used the qualitative research method so the lives of these eight working mothers can be examined.

This study used a qualitative method based on an interview format. In this approach, primarily open-ended questions were used. The major focus was to explore and then compared participants' responses to those questions. This method was chosen because it allows for a comparison of different experiences of a common topic. The individual experiences were compared, categorized by theme and presented as a shared story, similar in meaning for each participant. This method allows for a broader exploration of the topic being studied. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the work-life balance among married working women. This study was designed to explore the lives of working mothers and create awareness of what social workers need to know about this topic.

## Sampling

The purpose of this study was to conduct interviews with eight working married mothers to examine how current women balance work and family responsibilities.

Participants were chosen for the study based on the following criteria:

- Participation will be exclusively only for mothers of young children.
- Married to the father of their children.
- Women who work at least three days per week
- Women who have at least one child between ages two and twelve years old.

It was important to select participants who matched the above profile to understand how married working mothers balance work duties and personal responsibilities. Because the study intended to research how these women balance work and family life, the eight women were selected because they are mothers and have been working, raising children and dealing with home demands.

Participation for this study was entirely voluntary. Participants will sign a Consent Form (Appendix A).

## Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected from the interviews that will provide information about the experiences each participant will be sharing. The researcher attempted to obtain as much information as possible about each women's life

as a working mother. This research seeks to explore how work-life balance affects working mothers; therefore, the primary dependent variable is work-life balance. This variable was measured by the information provided by each participant during the interview process.

The dependent variable was at a nominal level of measurement. The history of lifestyle will serve as primary independent variables as well as the work-life balance. The independent variable was the following factor influencing the work-life balance each participant has experience. These are: family size, the age of children, work hours, coping skills and strategies and the level of social support they receive. This variable was measured by the information provided by each participant during the interview process. Fifteen questions were used to measure this. The independent variable was at a nominal level of measurement.

The instrument that was used to collect data consisted of fifteen questions (Appendix B). These questions were addressed the following topics: (1) the challenges married working mothers struggle when pursuing to balancing work and family life (2) the types of support systems they believe to be helpful for achieving balance in work and family life and (3) the strategies they rely on to balance work and family life.



## Procedures

The collected data consisted of face-to-face interviews. Each participant took part in an interview session that will last approximately 20-30 minutes. The researcher conducted and recorded each interview.

Before the interview process, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that will provide useful in providing necessary information from each participant (Appendix B). The questionnaire includes informational items such as job title, industry the woman works in, and the number of hours they work per week. Also, questions identifying the number of children each woman has, and the ages of the children. After those forms are completed, the recorder started as well as the interview.

Participants were selected on the criteria of being females, married to the father of their children, have at least one child between ages two and twelve years old, and who work at least three days per week. A letter of introduction of the study and request for volunteers were handout to women at a church in the city of Corona California.

Permission in writing was solicited and obtained from the head pastor of the church before distributing these letters. The interviews took place and time chosen by each participant. The interview was audio recorded so that it could be transcribed by the researcher at a later date which was expected in qualitative research.

## Protection of Human Subjects

No personal information was asked for during this study (This included all audio recordings), interviews were transcribed and all information gathered was stored in a computer protected by password. A consent form was discussed with each participant and required to be marked by them before the interview. The purpose of this form was to review the nature of the study, the time required by each participant and the questions that were asked during the interview. Participants were informed both verbally and in writing on the consent form, that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time without risk or penalty.

There are no anticipated risks connected with this study. There is also no risk for participants to experience any uncomfortable feelings or emotions due to the study. No direct benefits or reward was provided for participation in the study. This study will provide participants awareness on the burdens that exist in the lives of working mothers and the positive and negative aspects of their lives. Increasing understanding in this area is important as it may increase the awareness of work-life balance among married working women.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative procedures consisted of a series of fifteen questions directed to each participant. Each question was categorized by the challenges each participant perceived, the coping skills they have used and they amount and type of support they received that made difference to them. Also, the

impact of not having balance was analyzed. Data was interpreted by organizing it, breaking it into units, coding them and search for patterns. Interviews were carefully coded and compared to each of those previously coded.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the different components that were used in this study to explore the work-life balance of married working mothers and described how the personal narrative qualitative methodology were utilized in this research. This chapter also explained the data that was collected and how it was analyzed. Details on the selection of participants, procedures, data collection and data analyses procedures, and steps to ensure trustworthiness were also described. The procedures for the protection of human subjects were also outlined.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This study intended to explore the lives of working mothers. The information shared by the participants in the study will assist in the understanding of this complex and increasingly common lifestyle. The positive and negative aspects of the lives of mothers working will help shed light on the issues, dilemmas, and joys that go along with this role combination.

A qualitative methodology was used in this study. Domains and themes were discovered in the narratives of the lives of the working mothers which formed the basis for the data analysis conducted in this study. Included in this chapter is a presentation of the results from the transcribed and coded data derived from the in-depth interview used in this study that allowed various aspects of the working mother's life to be explored and examined.

The domains and categories in which these statements are assigned are defined and outlined. Direct quotes from participants are used to bring the meaning of each theme to light and to lend support and further describe the points in which participants sought to make clear.

#### Presentation of Findings

There were eight participants in the study. All women were married to the father of their children, work at least three days per week and have at least

one child between ages two and twelve years old. To illustrate how these women balance work and family life, this chapter carefully addresses the three research questions presented below (1) What challenges do married working mothers struggle with in balancing work and family life? (2) What types of support systems do they receive to be helpful in achieving balance in work and family life? (3) What strategies do they use to balance work and family life?

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Participant	Age	# of Children	Job Title	Weekly Work Hours	Support Programs at Work
P1	33	2	Preschool Teacher	40	Yes
P2	35	2	3rd grade Teacher	40	Yes
P3	32	1	License Social Worker	40	No
P4	34	2	Health Plan Specialist	40+	Yes
P5	33	4	Foundation Administrator Technician	40+	No
P6	47	6	Administrator	33	No
P7	32	3	6th grade Teacher	40+	No
P8	26	2	District Administrator	20	No

Table 2. Domains and Themes

Domain #1: Challenges	
Work Schedule	(4)
Not Having Time	(5)
Exhaustion	(4)
Domain #2: Support System	
Husbands	(6)
Grandparents	(4)
Co-workers	(4)
Bosses	(5)
Domain #3: Strategies	
Planning	(7)
Faith	(4)
Accepting Limitations	(6)
Total Statements	(49)

### Research Question 1: Challenges

When asked to name the barriers and challenges that make balancing work and non-work life most challenging, they stated their work schedule, time constraints, and exhaustion as their most significant ones. These challenges have been the main source of stress for these participants. Three major themes emerge under the domain of challenges. They are work schedule (n = 4 statements), not having enough time (n = 5), and exhaustion (n = 7).

#### Work Schedule

Not surprisingly, work schedule is a major challenge reported by the study participants. Both Participant one and seven explained how their work

schedules interrupt their family life, which causes problems because boundaries between these two factors are a daily barrier to their balance.

This was illustrated well by Participant 1 who stated:

My work schedule, sometimes my work schedule is the hardest thing because I wish I had a work schedule that would allow me to spend more time with my children because they need me. I feel that they need me. Yes, I wish I could spend more time with them. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

This was illustrated well by Participant 7 who stated:

For me being a teacher, grading. I have to bring my grading home. You know, I can stay at school until 6:00 at night and grade and then come home and have nothing. But then I come home cook dinner and the girls go to bed at 8:00 so I spend no time with no with them. So the barrier is I bring my work home, whereas some people can leave their work at work, I cannot, so that's a barrier for me. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

### Not Having Enough Time

Another frequently referenced topic that many of the participants disclosed was constantly feeling that they do not have enough time to meet all of their demands. Speaking specifically on non-work activities, some of the participants pointed directly to items like the time it takes to help kids with homework; getting children fed, bathed, and prepared for the next day, their

children's extracurricular activities, as well as the other non-child related demands that they have to find time for.

Participant 6 discussed how difficult it was for her to balance work and family life because of the lack of time to accomplish both. She said the following,

The barriers are just time. I wish I had more time to go over, beyond in my job to get the studies that I need, to take the time and to do more research in my area. And because that has become, in my life, a priority. And so time is definitely a barrier. And for my family as well. I want to meet every need that they have, because I have four children. So, even with my son having his kids, I want to be there for my grandkids. So, I definitely wish there's more hours in the day. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

### Exhaustion

Several of the mothers stated that if they are able to complete all of their responsibilities, it's at the expense of their own exhaustion, or at the minimum, time for self. Participants also cited several factors of physical stress in their current work-home situations. Some of them described themselves as being tired or exhausted. Several of the women in the study said they were often "tired" and had little or no time for themselves.



This was illustrated well by Participant 4 who stated:

I would say health because with some of the medical issues I have, I'm tired quite often or I'm in pain sometimes. And so the days that I'm not able to mentally or spiritually overcome it, it can take me away from being able to focus on what my family needs from me or what the workplace needs from me. So, there's days where I'm successful at that and days that I'm not, so I would say that's the biggest barrier for me.

(Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participants 5 revealed:

This field is high stress too because you're dealing with multi-million dollar donors. You're actually dealing with people who are high profile within the community, so you have to be on your game a lot. And by the time I get home, I'm exhausted. Just mentally and physically drained. So, it's like you give it all to your work and by the time you get home, you just want to watch a movie and make mac and cheese because you're too tired to even cook. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

This study identified exhaustion was one of the major challenges. This finding is consistent with Aumann, Galinsky, and Matos's study (2011) finding that the process of balancing the challenging demands of work and family life can be physical, psychologically, and personally debilitating for women. The study also found that not having enough time for family time is one of the main source of stress for these women. This finding is consistent with Hantrais's

study (1990) finding that the price paid was the lack of personal time and the feeling of guilt if any free time was not used to be with their children. Most women studied stated in this study that they would sacrifice their own free time and reduce the amount of sleep they had so that their children did not feel the adverse effects of having a working mother.

### Research Question 2: Support System

The second research question asked: “What types of support systems do they perceive to be helpful in achieving balance in work and family life?” Finding out about these support systems was a critical component of this study to understand how working mothers are able to balance work and family responsibilities. All the participants of this study discussed how they had to rely on various support systems to find balance in their lives. Overwhelmingly, all of the study participants acknowledged their critical reliance on their support person, or in some cases support network, in order to achieve some level of balance between their work and non-work lives. Primary support persons for the participants included their husbands, family and bosses, while co-workers, grandparents and mentors were also mentioned as other sources of support. When asked to name the main source of their support, they stated their husbands, grandparents, co-workers and bosses as their most significant ones. Four major themes emerge under the domain of support systems. They are husbands (n = 6 statements), grandparents (n = 4), co-workers (n = 4), and bosses (n = 5).

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the primary support persons' relationship to the participants.

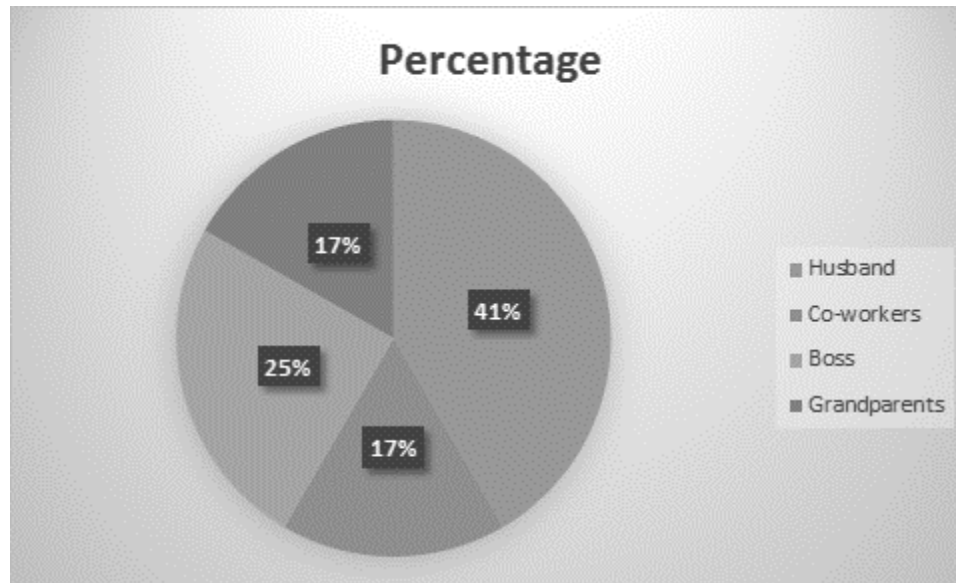


Figure 1. Breakdown of the Primary Support Persons'

### Husbands

Many participants stated that their husbands were their greatest support system, making it clear that they help with household duties. Participant 4 was the only participant whose husband is primarily responsible for domestic duties. She also stated that she has been able to focus on other demands and responsibilities as this allows her to have more time for her family when she gets home. She stated the following:

My husband is a huge supporter because he doesn't work, so he's home and he does so much at home that when I got home, I really get to focus on the time that I have with my family and enjoying it, and it's

not all work, work, work all the time, so that's nice. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participant 7 said:

At home. My husband. He lets me have freedom. I think I have a lot more freedom than most people. I can come and go and do what I need to do. I don't have to ask permission, but in support he steps in, you know, where I slack, he gives in. He helps, and the more I slack he helps, so we have that support, that's a big – that's a big one, because a lot of friends don't have that, but I know my husband will share life with me that way. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participant 8 said: "At home I have lots of family. But like mentally and emotional support and physically it's really just me and my husband" (Personal Interview, March 2016).

### Grandparents

The following participants expressed that the perfect babysitter was the grandparents, which allowed them to be able to go to work every day without having to worry about their children's safety and well-being. Participant 2 also stated: "At home, my mother-in-law comes to my house every day and takes care of the kids. I also have a lot of family close by that I'm able to call" (Personal Interview, March 2016). Participant 3 said: "At home I have my husband, and I have my daughter's grandparents. So, she has paternal grandparents and aunts, so it's pretty extensive family. And then on my side, I

have four sisters” (Personal Interview, March 2016). Participants expressed finding support in their families is a huge factor that contributes to their balance. Participant 5 stated: “My social support system just changed. My home support, because we moved closer to work, where the rest of my family is, I now have the support of my mother-in-law to watch my youngest child, who’s almost six months old” (Personal Interview, March 2016).

### Bosses

On the other hand, many of the women acknowledged that their direct supervisors provided support and flexibility for their day-to-day needs, even when that same participant viewed their employments as a whole adversely. These women often rely on their bosses and supervisors for support and encouragement who have assisted them during different times in their lives.

Participants 3 said:

My supervisor. She’s very supportive. So, she understands the struggle to find that balance of family and work. So, she’s very understanding. I also have a good counterpart at the children’s clinic. She’s also a therapist and she provides coverage for me when necessary. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participant 6 went on and said:

Social support? I know at work for the workplace that I have, it’s very supportive, because I work in a place where everyone’s a family and they understand your needs if you have to leave and go get your kids, if

you need to take some days off. And plus, I work with a pastor. So, I have a really positive work environment. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participants 7 also explained:

Well at work I have a lot of support. I have my boss, who I can go to if I'm having – struggling with something, and luckily she actually is a Christian so she supports me even on the God side of it too for, for life outside of work. When – if I go and I'm struggling and she'll pray with me and give me words of encouragement. But also she'll help me education-wise, well, how do I do this? Or how do that? Or is okay, for me to do this, and she's part of the union too so she helps me as far as the legal-wise; you know the logistics of things. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

### Co-workers

Participants mentioned finding crucial support on their co-workers. They explained that having co-workers who they can rely on gives them a truth sense of comfort and strength.

Participant 2 stated:

I have a lot of support and I think that makes working much easier. Here at work, my co-workers. There's other moms here. So, because I have small kids and sometimes if I'm in a meeting or something, there's

always someone I can rely on to watch my child or something.

(Personal Interview, March 2016)

This study identified husbands as the biggest supporters of the participants in order to achieve work-life balance. This finding is consistent with Crowley and Kolenikov's study (2014) finding that having the support of a spouse or partner at home reduced the risk for women to experience negative effects in their careers than those without a partner at home. This study concluded that having the support of a partner reduced this risk by 50.6 percent. This finding was also consistent with the idea that having a spouse provides these women with support in which they can rely on in order to maintain a good relationship with their careers.

### Research Question 3: Strategies

When asked to name the strategies that have helped these women the most to achieve balance, participants discussed how these strategies help balance work and family efforts. Three major themes emerge under the domain of strategies. They are planning (n = 6 statements), (faith n = 4), and (accepting limitations n = 6).

#### Planning

All the participants accomplished their work and household responsibilities by arranging their daily obligations and tasks in order of importance. The women emphasized the importance of planning ahead in order to save time and stress.

Participant 3 revealed:

Well, I try to prepare the night before because the time issue. So, I do a lot of preparing the night before. And if I'm on the road and it looks like I'm going to be late because of traffic or because of things that are out of my control like construction, I just kind of listen to music or I'll just take deep breath. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

### Faith

Participants stated that their faith was a crucial factor into how they dealt with stress in their daily lives. Participant 1 said:

I try to calm myself down and I ask God to help me and tell him God please help me because I can't with this situation, or my schedule and my son needs help with homework and that can be a problem too. So that helps me but I try to calm myself down too. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participant 4 expressed the immensely relief she gets from praying by saying:

Prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer. Like if I'm not talking to God, then I'm not getting through anything. That's the only way that I can overcome anything that I'm faced with. So, for me, prayer is my go to in everything that I do. I could be in the bathroom at work or in my car on the way home. Wherever I am, that is the one thing that gives me peace and that helps me to remove myself from the situation I may be facing and just kind of embrace the moment, rather than focusing on



what happened earlier in the day. So, for me, that's the one thing – besides my husband being a great supporter and him allowing me to vent when I need to, it's really prayer. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

Participant 8 went on and explained:

Prayer for me is something that helps me. So, the moments that I'm in the shower or in the car and I'm able to praise God and pray and have those intimate moments with him every day. Without those, that's what I get for me. Those are the moments I get for me. As far as my health, because I can't be active right now, there's really not much I can do, which I'm trusting in the Lord for healing. But there's not much I can do there, either. So, I don't really have a lot of time for me. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

### Accepting Limitations

The participants acknowledged that importance of knowing your limits and being comfortable with the idea that some days will be better than others and there will be some days that they won't be able to accomplish every goal of the day. As such, they are willing to accept their limitations to ensure their work demands do not interfere with their home life. This was illustrated by

Participant 6 who stated:

At the end of the day, I just realize that I did the best that I can do and tomorrow is a new day. And I make plans. I try to reorganize for whatever mistakes that might have taken place due to me not being

able to extinguish any fires that happened with me not here. I try to plan the next week and to see what we can do differently to cause the transition to be more smooth. (Personal Interview, March 2016)

The study identified planning and accepting limitations as the participant's most significant strategies to overcome challenges. This finding is consistent with Marshall's study (2009) finding that even though there is no equation to find balance, the women in this study were able to fulfill their roles as professionals and mothers. Part of their answer was to prioritize, make sacrifices, and compromise. Equally important, was the ability to embrace their love for their careers and families by believing in themselves and knowing their strengths and abilities.

### Summary of Conclusions

This chapter outlined the findings from the qualitative interviews. The three research questions were answered using the stories shared by the participants and the data collected. Following the findings, there was a discussion and analysis of the three research questions. This chapter summarized the 49 statements made by the eight participants. Statements were divided first into the categories of challenges, support system and strategies. Next statements were sorted as challenges (Domain 1), support systems (Domain 2), and strategies (Domain 3). Ten themes were identified. The summary, conclusions, and recommendations for social work practice and

further research based on the findings and implications of this study are discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Chapter Five contains a discussion on the results of the study, which were outlined in the previous chapter. Study limitations are presented, and recommendations for social work practice are introduced and discussed for future research.

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was intended to provide a better understanding of the work-life balance among married working women. This study was designed to explore the lives of working mothers and create awareness of what social workers need to know about this topic. It identified the challenges women face, their support systems as well as the strategies that have helped them live a life with balance. This discussion will examine the findings among the challenges statements, support system statements, and finally their strategies statements.

#### Challenges Category

Participant responses clearly reveal that challenges from balancing both home and work will create work/family conflict no matter what. However, many of this participants have found a sense of fulfillment from working outside the home, which is what drives them to overcome these challenges. More of this will be explained in Domain #3. One of the things these

participants had in common is that some things cannot be changed and they have to do what they can to achieve this balance as much as possible for themselves, their families and their jobs. The perseverance of all the participants is visible in the stories they shared about not giving up on their goals, the choices they make in their daily lives to do what is best for their families and jobs, especially standing by their families at all times, especially during times of need.

#### Support Systems Category

In seeking out support systems, the participants mentioned family as well non-family members in their support network. The participants especially relied on close family members when it came to emotional, personal, and family support. The participants stated they turned to their family for their support to take on their work and family responsibilities while their husbands helped with the demands. The non-family members the participants mentioned as part of their support system fell less into the personal part of their lives and more into the professional, turning to them for career advice and professional support. All the participants made it clear that without support, they would not be able to balance their career and domestic duties. Their support systems strengthened their ability to accomplish their work demands while completing their household responsibilities. Most participants mentioned that they are able to find satisfaction knowing that they are doing the best they can both at home

and work which feeds into their need to achieve balance in family and work life.

### Strategies Category

Participants found that planning in advance, relying on their faith such as praying and accepting their limitations has what has helped them overcome the burdens that come with juggling both home and work demands. Three participants have found that integrating their professional and personal priorities has facilitated their balancing work and family life. This was evident not only from their responses during the interviews. The participants acknowledged that finding equilibrium between their work demands and personal lives is a daily challenge, which has forced them to be creative and find ways to make the most of their time. The participants also make it clear that their families come first and work second, although they might not always be able to show it. Many of them make the daily effort to set boundaries between their work and family life because their jobs already prevent them from spending time with their families as it is. Using these strategies and seeking help from their support systems assist them fulfill their duties their roles require and achieve balance in their lives.

### Limitations

This study has limitations that are important for the reader to understand and be aware of. Interviews depend on personal interaction between the interviewer and interviewee; cooperation is an essential

component. One limitation was that some of the questions were quite personal, therefore, somewhat challenging for interviewees to answer truthfully or add more details. At times, they might be unwilling or uncomfortable sharing all that the researcher hoped to explore. However, it's likely that this limitation had very little or no effect on the outcome of the study due to the efforts made in creating rapport with the interviewees prior to the interviews. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants as well as the importance of their contributions to the topic. Participants took the time to respond each question.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

One of the things that surprised me the most to find through this research is the fact that most of the women I interviewed were not practicing self-care. The majority of them expressed being “okay” with a life in which they do not have time for themselves. They made sure they attended their children and completed their tasks at home and work, but showed very little contribution to their own health and well-being. Most of the participants reported not thinking or having the time for self-care activities or date nights with their husbands. Motherhood and working outside home left very little time for them to think about their marriages. As a result, these women experience an overwhelming amount of exhaustion as well as some conflict at home with their husbands.

The social work practice can contribute to this issue. One of the ways social workers can help women who experience high levels of stress related to the demands of balancing work and parenthood is by providing resources to help balance work and family life and encouraging support programs that aim towards the development of a healthy lifestyle and a positive attitude. Social workers can also create more awareness of the importance of self-care which has been shown to be neglected by most of the participants. Social workers can encourage the need for adequate rest and its significance. For example, sleep deprivation is an issue among those women who have infants or young children. Therefore, social workers can encourage self-care techniques that will allow for mental rest and time to promote personal coping behaviors.

Social workers can also encourage couples' counseling in which communication between the couple can be addressed as well as allowing women to express their feelings towards the challenges they experience. Mothers are often keeping their struggles to themselves because they are so preoccupied for others. Couples' counseling will give women a safe place in which they can let their spouses be part of their pursuit of self-care.

The participants of this study indicated that their husbands are their greatest source of support; without them, it would be difficult to balance their work and family responsibilities. Not having the spouses' support will significantly impact their work-life balance, as well as how they will cope with the challenges they face. Participants of this study were very clear and honest



to say that their husbands played a critical role in how they are able to achieve balance as they can to rely on them for household duties. Therefore, this study does not show how the lives of women would look like on each domain without the support of a spouse. Consequently, it is important for research studies to focus on single mothers who also work because they may face a unique set of struggles.

Another area of possible future research involves how work/family balance depends on whether the participant has a job or a career. The researcher interviewed participants of a wide range of employment, from administrator, to teacher and a social worker. Some were truly committed to their careers while others looked at their jobs and just a job. Having a career vs. a job may impact the challenges they face, the support systems they seek, and the strategies they employ may also be different as the type of commitment they have towards their jobs varies. Also, the concerns, issues, and activities of working mothers are likely to change as a function of the stage of their career. Future qualitative studies of working mothers may use a purposive sample but select characteristics different from those which were used in this study, for example, women who did not have children, and/or who had not completed college. Also, a broader group of women could also be asked, in a survey format, about the benefits and challenges they have experienced as working mothers. In regards to social work practice, future research could be done the effects of having support programs at work that

offer some sort of parenting support aimed at improving work-life balance. Only three out of eight participants in the study stated their workplaces offer some sort of support. This goes along with the study from Haslam et al. (2015) which showed that most of the participants (94%) reported having a hard time balancing their work and family lives. An 81% of these mothers said having support programs that provided some sort of interventions to help them cope with the challenges are needed; therefore, should be made available.

### Conclusions

Personally, I found the experience of interviewing the women in the study insightful and enriching. I also felt privileged to have the opportunity to get a glimpse of these women's lives and the influences which shaped them. This chapter discusses and explains the challenges, support systems and strategies reported by participants of this study. This chapter also discusses the limitations and suggestions for social work practices and research. The significance of the study was to provide a more in-depth understanding professionals, such as social workers and therapists the struggles and difficulties working mothers go through while trying to find balance in their lives.

Limitations of this study include the fact that this study only focused on married women leaving space for future research on single mothers.

Recommendations for social work practice include researching the impact on

women and their family lives when having support programs at work that offer some sort of parenting support aimed at improving work-life balance.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

# INFORMED CONSENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Social Work

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate in is designed to explore the work-life balance among married working women: what social workers need to know. This study is being conducted by a graduate student Romyna Becker under the supervision of Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Professor of School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work's Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board.

**PURPOSE:** This study will aim to gain a better understanding of the work-life balance among married working women as well as understand what strategies women use to manage internal and external stressors.

**DESCRIPTION:** You were selected to participate in this study because you are a female, married who is working at least three days a week and has at least one child between the ages 2 and 12 years old. In this study you will be asked to complete survey questions about your demographics, and participate in a fifteen question face-to-face interview.

**PARTICIPATION:** This survey is completely voluntary and any information that is obtained within this study will remain anonymous.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will be anonymous and data will be reported through emerging themes and categories.

**DURATION:** If you decide to participate in this study, you will be given twelve demographic survey questions and fifteen interview questions. The survey completion and interview process should take no more than 30-40 minutes to complete.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Participating in this study is unlikely to bring about any uncomfortable feelings or emotions. Participating in this study does not provide any direct benefits to individual participants other than providing insight on the burdens that exist in the lives of working mothers and the positive and negative aspects of their lives. Increasing understanding in this area is important as it may increase the awareness of work-life balance among married working women.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this survey, you can contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909)537-5507 or [rmccasli@csusb.edu](mailto:rmccasli@csusb.edu)

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the CSUSB Scholar Works database after June, 2016.

**CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:** This is to certify that I read and understand the information above, and decide to participate in this study.

Please mark an X below if you agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Please check a box if you understand that this research will be audio recorded.

Yes  or No

Mark

Date

909.537.5501 • fax: 909.537.7029 • <http://socialwork.csusb.edu/>  
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

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Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

APPENDIX B  
INSTRUMENT

## Interview Questions

1. How do you define work/life balance?
2. What social support (at work and at home) exists in your life
3. What social support do you wish were there?
4. What barriers prevent you from achieving balance in your work and non-work lives?
5. Have you perceived any parenting challenges due to career responsibilities?
6. Have you perceived any career challenges due to parenting responsibilities?
7. Describe any particularly regretful or particularly satisfying choices you have made as a working mother.
8. Are you experiencing or have you experienced conflict or stress from juggling work and home responsibilities?
9. How do you handle or cope with the conflict or stress experienced from juggling work and home responsibilities?
10. What compromises have you made to better balance work and home life?
11. What are your expectations of your spouse's role at home?
12. What has been the cost of your choice to commit to employment outside the home?
13. Does your workplace offer some sort of parenting support aimed at improving work-life balance?
14. With all of the responsibilities that you have outside of work, in addition to your work demands, how do you find time for your own personal health and wellness?
15. What advice would you give a working woman considering motherhood?

APPENDIX C  
DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE



## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

City and State of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_

### **FAMILY INFORMATION**

Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

### **EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION**

Industry: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Hours Worked per Week: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
DEFRIEFING FORM

## **DEBRIEFING STATEMENT**

This study explored what social workers need to know on work-life balance among married working women. This study will focus on three variables: the impact of the challenges, level of support and strategies of coping skills have on work-life balance. This study was conducted on a small sample size among working mothers. Interview questions were formulated and interviews were conducted with the hopes of gaining greater insight in identifying the issues and impacts women experience in balancing work and home responsibilities. I was mostly interested in the relationship between these three variables to see the effects they have on the role of women as well as the expectations women have of the roles of their spouses and the impact these expectations have on relationships at home are discussed and choices and the cost (consequences) of the choices women make when they commit to full time jobs are also identified in this study.

If you have any question, comments, or concerns due to participating in this study, please feel free to contact Romyna Becker or Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507 or [rmccasli@csusb.edu](mailto:rmccasli@csusb.edu). If you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this study, please contact the Pfau Library in Fall Quarter of 2016.

Thank you for your time and participation for completing this survey.

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