Female dentists and work–family balance: Challenges and strategies

J. Sandhya

Department of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics, Government College of Dentistry, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

Background: Achieving a work–family balance is of utmost importance to female dentists. The increasing number of women entering dentistry makes the issue of balancing the personal and professional life increasingly relevant. This study identified issues that Indian female dentists face and strategies they adapt to achieve a work–family balance.

Methods: A questionnaire was designed to obtain information from female dentists. The questionnaire was forwarded to 250 female dentists in Bhopal, Indore, and Gwalior region of Madhya Pradesh, of which 26% responded. The questions were designed to obtain information regarding success criteria, decision making, self-care, family issues, and maternal issues.

Results: The results strongly revealed the role conflict between managing the work and family duties. The survey describes the experiences of female dentists and adaptation to achieve a work-family balance.

Conclusion: Women dentists recognized difficulties in achieving a work–family balance that is unique to dental practice and strategies for adapting to their work and family duties. The survey revealed happy and balanced life as the criteria of success for nearly 1/4th of them, while most of the women were dependent on their family for decision making.

Clinical significance: The survey also revealed most of them were stressful and restless for holding both the responsibilities work and family. Their strategies to meet challenges included support from their family to achieve work–family balance.
in Bhopal, Indore, and Gwalior region of Madhya Pradesh, and there was a positive feedback from 26% (65) of the dentists. Questions were broad and designed to allow the participants to interpret the questions in the context of their own experience and generate their own thought processes. The questions were designed to obtain a definition of success, self-care, awareness, decision-making, and the challenges of work–family balance, what does success mean to you, when was the last time you took out time for your family, on a day off did you rest or were you restless, did you read or learn anything new today. Data gathered from the survey was coded and clustered into broad categories.

**Results**

Participating women dentists identified particular challenges to their personal and professional roles that are unique to their dental practice, and strategies for their adaptation to their maternal and professional duties. The specific challenges that affected the work–family balance were grouped into five themes, success criteria, self-care, decision-making, family issues, and maternal responsibilities.

**Success criteria**

Success criteria included the questions based on how a female dentist defined success for herself. The questions regarding the success of a female dentist showed that around 58% women felt that hard work for balanced life is their criteria of success, while 18% felt being rich and wealthy is what defines their success and 24% said that leading a happy and balanced life is what success meant to them. When asked, whether failure was an option for them? 89% of the women said “NO,” while 6% accepted that there can be times when they can fail and 5% left the question unanswered. When asked whether they gave up on their ideas a similar kind of response was reported in 88% of females, while 11% said that they would reconsider their ideas if someone said no to it and 1% of women left the question.

**Self-care**

Self-care is a deliberate, self-initiated regulator function which is under persons own control, the issues pertaining to self-care included questions on how often and frequently they took out time for their family and pamper themselves and on a day off, whether they rested or were restless?

The data gathered revealed that around 50% of women took out time for their families a month back, while 45% of them said less than a week ago and 5% said more than a year ago. Similarly, 48% of women pampered themselves a month ago and 32% said less than a week, and no response was noted for 17% of females. On a day off 55% of women had rest and around 45% of the participants were restless.

**Decision-making**

The thought process of making a wise decision is to select logically from the available choices, for this one should consider the positives and negatives of each choice and all the other alternatives. Decision-making issues included whether the women dentists took their personal or professional decisions independently and how many were dependent on others for the same. Results of the survey showed that 61% of females are dependent on family for their decisions and 36% of women participating in the survey are self-dependent, while 3% said they would depend on their friends for their decisions. When asked what kind of decisions they make at home or work, 19% of women said family related, while 24% said both family and work related and 57% of females did not answer the question.

**Family issues**

Family issues included the questions pertaining to the difficulties encountered by women dentists, i.e. issues regarding support of family for job or study, and if they had to leave their hometown for post graduate degree, 72% of women said they would try to make arrangements for the household work and then proceed, while 6% said they would leave the study plans, while 22% left the question unanswered. Similarly when asked if their family is against their job what would they do, 69% of women said they would make family understand and then continue with the job if their family is against their job, while 11% said they would go against the family, and 2% said they would leave the job for the family’s sake, while 18% did not respond to the question.

**Maternal responsibilities**

Parental issue is a critical part of life to balance for a female dentist. The questions asked pertaining to this issue included, how long a pregnancy leave, she requires during job or study, how will she manage her professional duties when pregnant? The data gathered showed that 71% of women said minimum 6 months, while 25% said a leave of more than 6 months would be sufficient for them and 5% did not answer the question.

Similarly when asked whether they would prefer a better job in another city or an average job in hometown, 82% said they would prefer a job in hometown rather than a better job in another city which only 14% of women preferred, when asked about leaving their child home while job in another city 67% said that they would make some arrangement for their child and continue with the job, while 28% said they would prefer to stay back and leave the job and 5% left the question unanswered.

When it came to prioritizing between family and work, 90% of the female dentists said they would give equal priority to both personal and professional life while 5% said they give priority to their family life and equal number (5%) said professional life.

**Discussion**

Female dentists participating in this study were surveyed on 5 themes based on the professional and personal challenges like achieving balance between professional and family life, success criterias, decision-making, time for self-care, and maternal responsibilities. They considered the challenges with their
personal and professional roles and the need to compromise and prioritize their duties to achieve a work–family balance. They recognized adaptations to both personal and professional lives and the areas in which they experienced difficulties.

With busy work schedule, the women dentists do not get sufficient time for themselves and their family. Most of the women participating in our study said that they did not get enough time for their family (50%) and even lesser time to pamper or look after themselves (48%) and even when they had a day off they could not rest and had to do household duties in order to manage their work and family balance and were restless (43%) suggesting the need for generating part time working options in India. Here, there is a limited possibility for working part time as compared to being a full time dentist. In England Murray reviewed different surveys carried out in different parts, and concluded that most of the women dentists preferred working part time on regular hours while half the women were working full time.

Katrova conducted a survey in Bulgaria and concluded that female dentists in Bulgaria met the challenges of the social and health reforms and despite the growing problems of maternity leave coverage and funding to reenter the profession. They were more interested in improving their qualifications and more successful in obtaining specialty status than male dentists. The volume of services delivered and profile of women in professional practice and their social and professional mobility are highly competitive.

Decision-making is an integral part of persons personality and for a female who is working independent should possess this quality and self-confidence to take their own decisions be it at work or at home, while the survey revealed that most of the women dentists depend on their family (64%) for decisions and only 36% of them are self-dependent and confident about their decision. When asked about what kind of decisions they make, only 24% of them said they make their own decisions about professional and family related issues. In Indian scenario the upbringing of women here is such that they are generally dependent on their husbands and family for all kinds of decisions.

Women generally find it difficult to balance between their maternal and work duties. Most dentists in our survey said that the pregnancy leave of 6 months is reasonably sufficient for them while others (25%) felt the need for few more months as pregnancy leave for their new born baby.

When it came to prioritizing between family and professional work, 90% of the female dentists said they would give equal priority to both personal and professional life. When asked about continuing the job/study during pregnancy, 79% of women said that they would continue their job while taking support and help of family members. Even if their child is small 67% of women said they would make necessary arrangements for their child and continue their work/study. This shows that for most
women dentist, their family duty is not a hurdle in achieving the professional goals, although most of them preferred a job in hometown rather than a better job in another city.

As far as success criteria is concerned, it could be extrinsic or intrinsic, for example, it could be relatively objective such as high pay and ascendency while for others it could be an individual’s subjective reactions to her own career as job satisfaction. In the present survey, most women felt hard work for balanced life as their success criteria while few defined success as being rich and wealthy and gave importance to materialistic things, and remaining dentists said that leading a happy and balanced life is their criteria of success.

Conclusion

The increasing number of women entering dentistry makes the issue of balancing the personal and professional life increasingly relevant. The results of this survey describe the experiences of female dentists and adaptation to achieve a work–family balance. The findings of our survey reveal the criterias of success for the women in dentistry, their dependence on their family, and their strategies of adapting their maternal and family responsibilities to achieve a work–family balance.

The survey reveals that happy and balanced life was the criterias of success for nealy one-fourth of the study population in dentistry, while most of the women were dependent on their family for decisions, their strategies of adapting to maternal and family responsibilities involves taking support of family members to achieve a work–family balance.

The survey also revealed that in an endeavor to attain a sound balance between work and family duties the women were generally under stress and were restless even on days off; this suggests that a part time job would be a better option of the female dentists working in this part of the country as compared to working full time [Figure 1].

References
