

BALANCING WORK-LIFE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF CAREER  
CHALLENGES OF WORKING MARRIED WOMEN OF KATHMANDU

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## AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Stuti Amatya* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Development Studies* presented on 26 January 2026 entitled *Balancing Work-life: A Narrative Study of Career Challenges of Working Married Women of Kathmandu*.

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In Nepal, married working women struggle to balance work and family under cultural norms that emphasize joint homes and women's roles within them. City life splits families, while NGO, bank, or casual jobs bring long, irregular hours. This forces hard choices, like skipping babies for field work or handling elders without time off, hurting health and progress.

Despite more women working, jobs lack flex hours, childcare, or shared home tasks. Women lean on spotty family help or tough it out alone. Money shortages and gender bias still limit choices, keeping many in survival—not thriving—needing studies on job-type strategies. This study used narrative research to capture women's experiences with the challenges they face in their work and personal lives, the support systems they rely on to fulfill their multiple roles, and the strategies and coping skills they use to maintain work-life balance.

This research aimed to explore how educated, married, working women cope with demands at home, work, and in their families. It mainly focused on the balance they have achieved in their lives as working women, wives, and mothers. Narrative research methods were used to collect participants' stories, which addressed the community's social, cultural, political, and ethnic aspects.

I have adopted an in-depth interview as a technique for information collection, so the informants have full space to reflect. Memorable, interesting learning about the challenges working married women face and how they tackle them was collected. The

major focus was to explore and then compare participants' responses to those questions. This method was chosen because it allows to compare different experiences of a common topic.

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana teach and guide married women on how to juggle their jobs and families, and the major areas they need to consider. Their experiences indicate that relying only on your own strength is not enough. To be successful, you need a combination of family support (such as from a spouse, parent, or neighbor), flexible employment policies (like changeable hours or leave possibilities), and your own hard work. These services work together to help people develop habits that they can stick to over time.

In conclusion, married women need family support to manage both work and home effectively. Flexible workplaces with understanding managers and leave policies help women balance job and family demands. Motherhood added responsibilities that require careful planning and strong support systems. Work-life balance is learned gradually through experience, adaptation, and setting personal limits.

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26 January 2026

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## शोधसार

विकास शिक्षामा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीका लागि स्तुति अमात्यको शोधप्रबन्धको शिर्षक “कार्य-जीवन सन्तुलन: काठमाडौंका कामकाजी विवाहित महिलाहरूको पेशागत चुनौतीहरूको एक कथात्मक अध्ययन” १२ माघ २०८२ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो ।

.....  
उप. प्रा. लीना गुरुङ, पीएचडी  
शोध निर्देशक

नेपालमा, संयुक्त परिवार र त्यसमा महिलाको भूमिकालाई जोड दिने सांस्कृतिक मान्यताहरूका कारण विवाहित कामकाजी महिलाहरू काम र परिवारबीच सन्तुलन मिलाउन संघर्ष गर्छन्। शहरी जीवनले परिवारलाई विभाजन गर्छ, जबकि गैर-सरकारी संस्था, बैंक, वा अस्थायी प्रकृतिका कामहरूले लामो र अनियमित कार्यसमय ल्याउँछन्। यसले गर्दा उनीहरूलाई कठिन निर्णयहरू लिन बाध्य पार्छ, जस्तै फिल्डको कामको लागि सन्तानको योजना थाती राख्ने वा बिदा नलिई वृद्धवृद्धाहरूको हेरचाह गर्ने, जसले उनीहरूको स्वास्थ्य र प्रगतिमा नकारात्मक असर पुऱ्याउँछ। धेरै महिलाहरू काममा संलग्न भए तापनि, रोजगारहरूमा लचिलो कार्यसमय, बाल हेरचाह, वा घरको कामको बाँडफाँडको अभाव छ। महिलाहरू परिवारको आंशिक सहयोगमा निर्भर हुन्छन् वा एकलै यो कठिनाइको सामना गर्छन्। आर्थिक अभाव र लैंगिक पूर्वाग्रहले अझै पनि छनोटहरूलाई सीमित गर्दछ, जसले गर्दा धेरैलाई फस्टाउने भन्दा पनि जेनतेन गुजारा चलाउने अवस्थामा मात्र सीमित राख्छ। यसले रोजगारीको प्रकारमा आधारित रणनीतिहरूको अध्ययनको आवश्यकतालाई दर्साउँछ।

यस अध्ययनले महिलाहरूले आफ्नो काम र व्यक्तिगत जीवनमा भोग्ने चुनौतीहरू, आफ्ना बहु-भूमिकाहरू पूरा गर्न उनीहरू भर पर्ने सहायता प्रणालीहरू, र कार्य-जीवन सन्तुलन कायम राख्न प्रयोग गर्ने रणनीतिहरू र सामना गर्ने सीपहरू संकलन गर्न वृत्तान्त अनुसन्धान विधिको प्रयोग गरेको छ। शिक्षित, विवाहित, कामकाजी महिलाहरूले घर, काम र परिवारका मागहरूसँग कसरी तालमेल मिलाउँछन् भनेर अन्वेषण गर्नु यस अनुसन्धानको उद्देश्य थियो। यसले मुख्यतया कामकाजी महिला, पत्नी र आमाको रूपमा उनीहरूले आफ्नो जीवनमा कसरी सन्तुलन हासिल गरेका छन् भन्ने कुरामा ध्यान केन्द्रित गरेको छ। सहभागीहरूका कथाहरू संकलन गर्न वृत्तान्त अनुसन्धान विधिहरूको प्रयोग गरिएको थियो, जसले समुदायको सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक, राजनीतिक र जातीय पक्षहरूलाई सम्बोधन गरेको छ।

जानकारी संकलन गर्ने प्रविधिको रूपमा मैले गहन अन्तर्वार्ता अपनाएको छु, जसले गर्दा सूचनादाताहरूलाई आफ्नो विचार व्यक्त गर्ने पूर्ण अवसर प्राप्त हुन्छ। कामकाजी विवाहित महिलाहरूले

सामना गर्ने चुनौतीहरू र उनीहरूले त्यसलाई कसरी समाधान गर्छन् भन्ने बारेमा स्मरणीय र रोचक सिकाइहरू संकलन गरियो। मुख्य ध्यान ती प्रश्नहरूमा सहभागीहरूको प्रतिक्रियाहरू अन्वेषण गर्न र त्यसपछि तुलना गर्नमा केन्द्रित थियो।

सीता, पूर्णिमा, संगीता र कल्पनाका कथाहरूले विवाहित महिलाहरूलाई आफ्नो जागिर र परिवारलाई कसरी एकसाथ अगाडि बढाउने र उनीहरूले विचार गर्नुपर्ने मुख्य क्षेत्रहरूका बारेमा सिकाउँछन् र मार्गदर्शन गर्छन्। उनीहरूका अनुभवहरूले के संकेत गर्छ भने आफ्नै बलमा मात्र भर पर्नु पर्याप्त हुँदैन। सफल हुनका लागि परिवारको सहयोग (जस्तै श्रीमान, आमाबुवा, वा छिमेकीबाट), लचिलो रोजगार नीतिहरू (जस्तै परिवर्तन गर्न मिल्ने कार्यसमय वा बिदाको सम्भावना), र आफ्नै कडा परिश्रमको संयोजन आवश्यक पर्छ। यी सेवाहरूले मिलेर काम गर्दा मानिसहरूलाई समयको साथ पालना गर्न सक्ने बानीहरू विकास गर्न मद्दत गर्दछ।

निष्कर्षमा, विवाहित महिलाहरूलाई काम र घर दुवैलाई प्रभावकारी रूपमा व्यवस्थापन गर्न परिवारको सहयोग आवश्यक पर्छ। बुझ्ने प्रबन्धक र बिदाको नीतिहरू भएको लचिलो कार्यस्थलले महिलाहरूलाई जागिर र परिवारको मागहरू बीच सन्तुलन कायम गर्न मद्दत गर्दछ। मातृत्वले थप जिम्मेवारीहरू ल्याउँछ जसको लागि सावधानीपूर्वक योजना र बलियो सहायता प्रणाली आवश्यक पर्दछ। कार्य-जीवन सन्तुलन अनुभव, अनुकूलन, र व्यक्तिगत सीमाहरू निर्धारण गरेर बिस्तारै सिक्किन्छ।

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स्तुति अमात्य  
उपाधि उम्मेदवार

१२ माघ २०८२

This dissertation entitled *Balancing Work-life: A Narrative Study of Career Challenges of Working Married Women of Kathmandu* was presented by *Stuti Amatya* on 26 January 2026.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.

.....

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26 January 2026

## DEDICATION

To my parents, my husband and my daughter who served as motivation for me throughout the process and to all the all the working women who are successfully balance the work-life.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AERA	American Educational Research Association
GESI	Gender Equity and Social Inclusion
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
KMC	Kathmandu Metropolitan City
MoFAGA	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
NLC	National Law Commission
WLB	Work Life Balance

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Married working women often experience significant conflict between work demands and family responsibilities, leading to slower career progression and emotional stress (Aryee, 1992). In the development field, I have seen many women successfully balance their personal and professional lives. Some married women are working and pursuing education. I have been working as a Research and Monitoring and Evaluation Professional for more than eight years and travelling to rural areas has been part of our profession. And I know some married women continue to work even though they have small babies, and those who skipped fieldwork due to family responsibilities.

Let me tell a story about my 41-year-old cousin, who lives in Kathmandu and works in a bank. She has been married for ten years. She had eight years old son. She tells her story that after three months of her delivery, she continued to join her office. She shares how difficult it was for her to leave her son back home. She had appointed a caretaker to look after her child. The caretaker came to her home every day, looked after her son, and helped with household chores. She was suffering from conflicting demands between family and work. Conflicts between the demands of work and motherhood, for example, childbearing and nurturing time, pregnancy, and work, mean that the progress of work is stopped or slowed down. Her office workload is very high, and she sometimes has to stay late. She said that her husband supports her and looks after her child whenever she is late from work. According to her, it's not easy for women to manage both their personal and professional lives without family support (Begum et al., 2024). On the other hand, she feels she is unable to give time to her family and was unable to attend the family function due to a lack of leave and her inability to provide proper care for family members. Therefore, she is managing her work and family life with support from her husband and other family members. Each day, she feels it is essential to prioritize aspects of daily life and practice effective time management.

Although working women hired a maid to do their household work, they had to pay more. My cousin, being economically well-off, could afford a caretaker, but for women who are not as strong or don't have family support, coping with the challenges would have been very difficult. However, traditionally, women had been homemakers, but in recent decades, proper education, better awareness, in addition to the ever-increasing cost of living, have made them go out and choose careers (Winkler, 2016)

Continuous religious, cultural, and traditional norms prioritize family over women's careers, forcing many educated women to sacrifice professional ambitions. I know a lady in my family who married immediately after graduating at the age of twenty-three. She is 52 years old, a resident of Kathmandu who couldn't work due to her household responsibilities. There were four members in her home, including herself, her husband, her father-in-law, and her brother-in-law. Her father-in-law was very sick, and there was no one to look after him. In addition, she had to take on another household task because she was the only female member of the household. This shows that religious, cultural, and traditional views still exist that encourage educated women to prioritize their families (Clarke, 2025). She was a bright and active student in her college days and had dreamt of building her career in the management field, as she was a management student, but unfortunately, she couldn't work. She was willing to work after her marriage, but because of household chores and other responsibilities, she had to compromise her desire to work to stay home and fulfill her family responsibilities. She has been married for 29 years and has a 20-year-old son. She is now taking care of her son and husband. Her father-in-law died ten years ago, and her brother-in-law is now married, and they live separately. She is in her fifties, and she always feels sad that she had to sacrifice her career for family responsibilities. She shares that she is not confident enough to make her own decisions and that, when she does, she always relies on her husband. I felt that if she had managed to work despite family barriers and other responsibilities, she would have been economically and socially strong. Like her, many other married women had been through the same circumstances.

Therefore, married working women are experiencing conflicting demands between family and work (Aryee, 1992). These triggered me to study the challenges married working women face. This study was designed to explore the career challenges

faced by educated, married working women in urban Nepal. It explored the lives of married professional women.

Over the past few years, the terminology shifted from work-family balance to work-life balance, acknowledging that, in addition to family, people hold multiple roles in their personal and professional lives to fulfill various goals. Work-life balance has gained importance in recent years, especially in developing countries (Verma et al., 2024). Work-life balance affects both genders. In the case of females, married women are the most affected by the issue of work-life balance since they must play multiple roles, and it becomes difficult for them to strike a perfect balance between work and family (Rendon, 2016). The work-life balance of women employees has become an important issue as society has changed, with both men and women sharing the responsibility of earning to support their family lives.

The increased employment rates of women have challenged long-held cultural norms about gender and division of household tasks (Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003). Traditionally, women's roles were cooking, cleaning, and raising children. They were viewed as caregivers or homemakers and denied access outside the home. But today, women have made their mark in every field. Be it literature, the arts, politics, sport, corporate life, or any other sphere, women are ready to take on challenges. Times are changing from the traditional, where the husband earned, and the wife stayed at home, to the modern, when the husband earns, and the wife earns too. But the wife still cooks, washes, and runs the house. Although women have begun spreading their wings across all spheres of life, the traditional concept of women as homemakers has not left people's minds. So, today's women are continually striving for work-life balance.

In the community, there is growing concern that the quality of home and community life is deteriorating. The conflicts between work life and non-work life, especially conflicts between work and family responsibilities, are significant stressors. Examples of work-life conflicts include nights and weekends spent at work rather than with family, work schedules so full that vacations are not possible, and work obligations that require arranging childcare at the last minute. Work-life balance enables employees to feel as if they are paying attention to all the important aspects of their lives.

### **Statement of Problem**

It is very important for women to be properly guided and to stick to their decisions to manage both family and work-life, even when they are overburdened by family responsibilities (Shah et al., 2025).

While working women face many challenges each day, such as caring for a child, getting involved in their children's school lives, helping with their homework while meeting job demands, and ensuring their well-being. They need to attain an adequate balance between work and family life (Reddy et al., 2010). Women can work, but they still face problems in the workplace and at home. Women working in some industries, factories, banks, hospitals, etc., complain that they do not get time to look after and give care to their babies. Although working women hired a maid to do their household work, they had to pay more.

On the other hand, although various policies have been put in place to assist women in achieving equal rights with men, the efficiency of working women is often questioned and doubted by many, especially their male counterparts.

In addition to harassment, evidence consistently shows that women are immensely concentrated in lower-level positions, even when they have the proper qualifications and skills required for higher-level roles and responsibilities. Women's presence in leadership positions is limited not because of a lack of their skills or ability, but because of organizational practices and social norms that create unequal career opportunities. Studies suggest that women's limited opportunities for leadership and managerial roles are affected by biased performance evaluations, fewer networking platforms and opportunities, and assumptions and perceptions about women's commitment to work due to family responsibilities.

Evidence from both the public and private sector organizations tells that flexible working hour, leave policies, childcare facilities, and safe and healthy working environments significantly increase women's job satisfaction, efficiency, and retention. These measures not only support and help women in balancing work and family but also contribute to overall organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Therefore, the adoption of inclusive and friendly workplace policies is essential for boosting women's confidence to perform effectively and pursue their careers

efficiently. A supportive working environment helps reduce gender-based challenges and allows female employees to manage work demands effectively, benefiting both employees and organizations. This finding shows that gender-inclusive and equitable workplaces are more productive, sustainable, and inclusive.

Research-based studies constantly indicate that women face challenges in resolving professional and domestic responsibilities, particularly where there is no familial support. Studies on gender roles show that women are expected to take care of the house, children, and elderly people, even if they work full-time. On the other hand, men still don't have many responsibilities in household work, meaning the work that needs to be done at home is still not evenly split. It indicates that working married women regularly face limitations in their day-to-day mobility and professional engagement due to family responsibilities and expectations. Research in South Asian contexts indicates that women's participation in work-related travel, training, workshops, and professional networking is often constrained by cultural and social barriers, thereby limiting their career advancement. Women experience role conflict when organizational rules and regulations fail to provide adequate time off or work-life flexibility, hindering their ability to meet household and societal obligations.

It also emphasizes the importance of women's economic strength. Families with children need two incomes as living expenses rise. How much women earn may affect the health of the family, the education of the kids, and the overall stability of the economy. Also, women have more control over their money, choices, and freedom at home when they may work for money. This disconnect not only creates barriers but also restricts organizational productivity; gender-inclusive policies could empower women, but without mindset shifts, they symbolize slow progress and increase inequities.

### **Purpose of Study**

To explore an understanding of the married working women lived experience of Work-Life Balance (WLB).

### **Research Questions**

a. How do married women experience challenges of balancing household and job responsibilities?

b. How do married women respond to the challenges of balancing household, job, and responsibilities?

### **Significance of the Study**

Over the past several decades, employers, societies, and individuals have come to recognize that the work and family lives of individuals are intertwined and consistently influence one another. This study aims to gain a better understanding of married women's roles in the home and the workplace. The positive and negative aspects of the lives of women working at a professional level will help shed light on the issues, dilemmas, and joys that accompany this role combination. The study results should also be of interest to other professionals, as they provide a deeper understanding of the struggles and difficulties working women face in seeking balance in their lives.

The organization where I used to work provides one day of leave per month to all female workers so they can have one day's rest during their menstrual period. Moreover, nowadays, with a specific focus on women in the workplace, various initiatives, such as paid maternity leave, sick leave, and annual leave, among others, have been implemented in organizations to help women achieve a proper WLB. Despite a surge in female employees across nearly all sectors, opportunities remain unevenly allocated, with women—particularly in developing nations still encountering discrimination both domestically and professionally. A recent International Labor Organization (ILO) report reveals women's global labor force participation at just over 49%, compared to 76% for men, creating a stark 27-percentage-point gender gap. Women make up just 26% of paid workers compared to 54% men. In addition to structural challenges, initiatives have been introduced to support working parents. A Child Care Center operates at Singha Durbar, providing care for the children of civil servants while their parents carry out public duties. Civil servants working within the Singha Durbar premises are eligible to use the center's services. This arrangement helps parents, particularly women, participate more fully in paid work by reducing the childcare burden. Facilities like this represent an important step toward improving work-life balance and supporting women's continued engagement in the workforce. Despite it being set out in law and policies, most private employers do not provide maternity leave to their employees (Shrestha, 2025). When they get pregnant, women often must quit their jobs as they are unable to come to work,

especially in the latter stages of their pregnancy. Furthermore, given the increasing pressure and demands placed on working women, balancing work and personal life can be challenging and stressful for many. Also, work-life balance remains a major concern for most women, who are constantly trying to balance their personal and professional lives. The study aims to identify the challenges working married women face in balancing their family and work lives and to uncover the strategies they use to address them. By learning about these strategies from women who have succeeded, future generations of women may have an equal opportunity to achieve the same.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. When you look at the outcomes of this study, there are a few things you should bear in mind. There may be recall bias, since individuals could misremember events from the distant past. Second, the research examines only the experiences of married women employed in specific regions of Kathmandu, rendering the findings inapplicable to other locations, rural settings, or women in diverse social or economic contexts. Third, the study focuses only on women's perspectives, not those of their husbands, employers, or other family members. This may have led to a more nuanced understanding of how work and home life interact. These limits show that, while the study provides valuable insights into the lives of women in Kathmandu, we need to be cautious when applying the results to other groups.

### **Overview of the Study**

This dissertation explores on how married working women in Nepal manage the balance between work and family responsibilities within a context shaped by cultural norms, expectations, and gender roles. Using the work–family border theory, the study explores how expectations and social norms create tensions between work and home, and how women balance these boundaries in their daily lives.

The study followed a qualitative approach, and it is based on the lived experiences of participants such as Sita, Kalpana, Sangita, and Purnima. The participants' stories highlight the challenges in a society where family responsibilities usually take priority over career demands. The study also examines the role of “border-keepers,” such as

family members and workplace people, in shaping the ability of women's to manage these boundaries.

The findings said that instead of the presence of workplace rules and policies the gaps in implementation of these policies make it difficult for women to achieve a balanced work–family life.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the context of working married women. I began by presenting my thoughts for conducting the study, reflecting on the stories and drawing experiences of people I know with work-life balance. These were aimed at showcasing how my personal and professional experience motivated me to study work-life. I then presented the purpose of the study, research problems, research questions, significance of the study, and limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Work-life balance is an issue of interest because women are pursuing jobs and careers while having families. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature related to how women balance their lives with the responsibilities of both work and family. Balancing job demands and household tasks, including childcare, has been identified as a major barrier to achieving work-life balance. By exploring the challenges women face in day-to-day life, future working married women can gain a better understanding of how to balance work and family life.

#### **Thematic Review**

Married working women globally, as well as in Nepal, have to go through work-life balance difficulties from managing professional duties with domestic responsibilities, with patriarchal expectations, and limited organizational support. These pressures lead to role overload, long-term stress, interpersonal conflicts, and slower career progression, as confirmed by multiple studies. (Bharadwaj & Shanker, 2019; Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018; Sundaresan, 2014)

Women who work and are married often struggle to balance their work and home lives. They are engaged in offices with strict hours, including continuous meetings and tight deadlines. Then they get back home to do household work like cooking, cleaning, caring for kids, and caring for their aging parents. In Nepal, women do almost all the housework, even if their husbands work too. Men don't help much, so women must do most of the work, starting at sunrise and going on until evening. These pressures result in career obstacles, never-ending stress, and delayed career growth. Many evidence-based studies have repeatedly identified role overload and interpersonal conflict as central obstacles. Nepal-focused investigations further illuminate deep-rooted cultural and systemic deficiencies that persist despite progressive legal frameworks (Shrestha & Poudel, 2024). Different research has highlighted time limitations, overtiredness, and work schedules as core issues, along with limited spousal or organizational support and

the inability to fulfill wife/mother/professional roles while meeting cultural expectations (Rendon, 2016).

Various studies have identified and confirmed conflict, overload, and patriarchal norms as dominant themes, advocating clear organizational guidelines and policies. Married working women worldwide, including in Nepal, confront profound work-life balance difficulties arising from juggling professional duties with domestic responsibilities, entrenched patriarchal expectations, and limited institutional support (Rendon, 2016). It shows that there are cultural problems, such as the unequal division of household work and the lesser involvement of spouses, even when the law is equal. Women in Kathmandu experience significant work-family conflict because they work long hours, 6 days a week, and society expects them to fulfill both household and work duties. This is making them less happy in their marriages and at work. Recent research suggests a negative relationship between work-life balance and well-being, and calls for flexible policies to address these problem (Shrestha, 2025). Given the limited research on the career challenges faced by married women in Nepal, there is limited understanding of the complexities of this problem. This research aims to shed light on the work-life balancing strategies by exploring the views and opinions of married working women on the issue. There are many factors that influence the balancing of women's work-life; therefore, this study seeks to capture these factors by exploring the lived experiences of working married women.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance is a global issue that has received significant attention. According to Bird (2004), work-life balance does not mean an equal balance between work and other aspects of life because trying to assign an equal number of hours for each of an individual's work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. He stresses that an individual's best work-life balance will vary over time, and this can happen daily. Similarly, scholars also argue that the right balance for someone today will probably be different tomorrow (McGonagle et al., 2022). For example, the Right-balance for a person when he/she is single will differ from when he/she gets married, has children, starts a new career, or is nearing retirement. And as there is no specific rule or one-size-fits-all approach, the best work-life balance strategy from varies upon person to

person, as people have different backgrounds, family expectations, priorities, and lives (Bansal, 2024). For example, married working mothers usually face higher daily demands and expectations than married women without children. The children devote substantial time to childcare duties, such as school drop-offs, feeding, and handling illnesses, which intensify role conflicts between home and office. Childless women, by contrast, often focus more on couple time, hobbies, or career development, allowing lighter household loads and greater personal flexibility.

Similarly, a woman working in a bank might have different experiences from those working in an INGO, and experiences can differ by age and family support. A lady who works at a bank has set hours, say 10 to 5, and must meet sales objectives and deal with customers all day. She had to hurry back home to finish additional household work because there was little time to spare if the kids were sick or needed time. Someone at an INGO might have fewer limitations; she can work on projects from home if needed, but she has to go on last-minute trips or meet funding deadlines that keep her away from her family for weeks (Shrestha & Poudel, 2024).

Age is another factor. Women in their 20s and early 30s are learning and doing everything, including taking on new jobs and caring for their families and newborns. They hardly sleep. People in their late 30s use what they know and can ask for better setups, but they also have to take care of their family and manage their children's day-to-day schedules. People over 40 don't care about starting a career from scratch; they just want consistent salaries (Dongen et al., 2024).

Family support can make or break it. If her spouse helps her with cleaning, cooking, and caring for the children, she feels much less stressed and stays in her job. If you don't obtain aid, you could have to work fewer hours, turn down raises, or even leave. For example, a 28-year-old banker mom with unsupportive in-laws who leaves her daughter-in-law after her maternity leave and lets her handle both the baby and office work alone, and a 42-year-old developmental field professional with a spouse who works from home and keeps going strong.

### **Married Women's Career Challenges**

In modern society, most women are employed. Working married women everywhere, including Nepal, face massive daily battles to keep their jobs and home lives from crashing into each other (Shrestha, 2025)

Office demands hit hard—office reporting times, traffic jams eating up travel time, client calls at odd hours, then they drag themselves home for the real household responsibilities: chopping vegetables for dinner while babies are crying, folding laundry past 10 PM, or rushing elderly parents to clinics. Nepal's traditional ways make it worse. Society expects women to run the house no matter what, even if husbands earn too. Men might fix a leaky tap once a month but skip diaper changes or grocery runs, dumping everything else on wives. These two jobs start early in the morning and do not finish till midnight. Broader analyses show that women have to do both unpaid (household duties) and paid work, which leads women to have very little time for themselves to rest or to have personal time (Alaref et al., 2024). In Western societies, work is often seen as just as important as or sometimes more important than family, reflecting a focus on personal achievement and independence. In Canada, for example, people tend to prioritize career growth and earning potential, sometimes more than time with family. The structure of nuclear families in these societies gives individuals more freedom to decide how to divide responsibilities between work and home. Achieving balance is supported by sharing household tasks equally and by workplace policies like flexible hours and parental leave, which allow both partners to take an active role in work and family life. This approach assumes that both the family and the workplace support people in managing their roles.(Sousa et al., 2025).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that 47% of the global workforce is women (ILO, 2024). This development has given women greater influence in both their personal and professional lives, but it has also changed how families are structured and the responsibilities of men and women. In the past, women were mostly perceived as homemakers who took care of the house, while men were seen as the ones who brought home the money. Everyone saw women as housewives stuck at home; cooking meals, scrubbing floors, chasing after kids while men went out to earn cash and

pay the bills. That setup worked okay when life meant working in fields or running factories by hand, where men's strength ruled. But it trapped women in endless unpaid work, with no money of their own, and left them totally reliant on husbands for every single expense. But with globalization, more women entered college, and organizations and women began seeking financial independence and personal fulfillment through their jobs (Garcia & Hu, 2024). Financial independence became the primary motivating factor. It became difficult to run a household on a single earner's income, as there are many expenses such as rent, food, kids' school bills, and other costs. Therefore, in this case, the women need to go out to earn a living to support the household expenses and make life easier. Starting a job gives you real power, picking out your own clothes, paying for school supplies, and becoming financially independent.

But it ran deeper than cash. Women wanted more than being "just a wife." They pursued the real meaning of running meetings and solving tough problems, rather than just fulfilling household responsibilities. Jobs handed them a sense of who they were, some respect from others, and a break from household duties.

Women's career development is often recognized as more complex than men's due to multiple barriers within social, cultural, and political structures (Fernandez et al., 2021). Women usually have a more difficult time advancing in their careers than men do because they face obstacles at every level, including family obligations and social and cultural beliefs. If you have to take care of kids or elderly parents, you can't go to after-work networking events that men easily get to. The challenges that women generally face in their career paths include traditional gender-role biases, unequal employment opportunities, and work-life conflicts.

Career and family goals look to be on a challenging path for working married women. Jobs are very demanding, and the family is demanding too, especially when there are small children, elderly parents, and sick family members to take care of. Jobs often demand extended hours, overtime, strict timetables, and heavy workloads, which can drain employees' energy for family obligations. Workplace systems rarely adjust to family priorities, which amplifies the work-home tensions I feel. Although women have started working outside their homes, they still have a long way to go, both culturally, socially, and economically, to bring about positive attitudinal changes in people's minds.

Women still perform most of the caregiving roles and juggle work in the family. On the other hand, gender is a significant determinant of negative job spillover because employed women are expected to assume responsibility for family care while still managing their work roles effectively. In the case of married working women, family members do not allow them to go on an office tour. Even if women professionals are in high positions in their offices, they must return home at the right time, cook, clean, and look after their family affairs. They encounter professional barriers because rigid family duties prevent them from attending key networking events, such as business trips or extended hours.

### **Women in Patriarchy**

Tiwari (2014) writes that in Nepal, women of every section of society are excluded in one form or another. The situation may have improved significantly if we look at cases involving women, especially in urban areas. For example, they don't have to eat from their husband's plate anymore, and they may get to participate in major household decision-making. In urban settings, women frequently move beyond outdated forms such as eating from a husband's plate and gain roles in key household decisions, bolstered by their financial input. Dual-income families and greater exposure to progressive values promote joint authority, lightening certain conventional pressures. Having said that, the norms and values of patriarchy still lurk. Yet patriarchal norms persist, as families continue to limit women's travel or extra hours while insisting they handle cooking and childcare above all else (Lindkvist, 2024)

In this manner, Gyawali (2014) writes that prevailing from the pastoral or nomadic period, the patriarchal system set up controls over women's bodies, labor, income, mobility, sexuality, ideology, and even identity. He further continues that patriarchy is traditionally a characteristic of an agrarian society. Agricultural civilizations were run by men; they were the ones who hunted and gathered food for the family and controlled the social, cultural, and political norms. Females had little or no say in these matters. Education was/is denied to women because it was believed to create conflict in the mutual relationship between husband and wife and within the family (Luitel, 1970). In the past, it was also believed that "women who learn to read and write become

witches". Making them ignorant was an effective way to sustain patriarchy, which is still prevalent in many cases.

With time, these agricultural societies prospered; however, the status of women didn't improve (Gyawali, 2014). Individual families were established on a patriarchal basis, with the man of the family making the key decisions, and with humble obedience owed to this male authority. The situation is no different today; the property is automatically transmitted from father to son (Gupta et al., 2023). Girls are known by their father's name and later by their husbands. In my view, the situation of women today is, in fact, poorer than that of women in the agrarian period. Modern women now need to perform household chores while standing with, or even ahead of, men in official work. For example, despite my uncle being retired and me being a working woman, my aunt has to do all the household chores without her husband supporting her with any of them. And at times, despite having equal or even higher academic qualifications, she earns the minimum wage compared to her male counterparts.

These instances show that women in Nepal are disadvantaged, underrepresented, and discriminated against and exploited in all areas of society, be it domestic affairs or the sectors outside the home. This is due to the socio-cultural views held by most of the Nepalese population, the political forces that uphold these views, the economic constraints placed on women, and their limited educational opportunities (Gyawali, 2014). Therefore, to keep our balance, we must keep moving. This is true for all employees struggling with work-life balance, especially women, who face many challenges both at work and at home. If they are unable to maintain the balance, the consequence will be serious.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research aims to understand the work-family lives of working married women and to learn which strategies they use to cope with day-to-day challenges. To do so, it is most important to know the women's backgrounds, including their family members, workplaces, and occupations.

Role conflict occurs for women when rigid family and professional demands hinder their ability to balance both responsibilities. People typically expect women to put childcare, cooking, and caring for the elderly ahead of their careers when they are at

home with their spouses and family. Male bosses at work may not be helpful, such as when they won't let you take emergency leave for sick kids or discourage you from making personal calls. This problem is greater in Nepal because there is a gap between policy and reality. For example, even though there is a rule that allows women to take maternity leave, many still have unfavorable ideas about women and think they will always put family before deadlines. Gender role theory further explained these pressures, saying that societal norms assign specific roles: for women, nurturing and domestic responsibilities, and for men, going out and earning as a breadwinner for the family, which automatically prioritizes familial responsibilities over women's professional ambitions (Flynn, 2023). In everyday life, this means women have the obligation to put family first, even when they are busy with work and pursuing careers, while men are perceived as having to focus on their careers. This makes it tougher for married working women to get further in their careers without feeling guilty or getting in trouble, especially in patriarchal countries like Nepal, where these values are still considered important.

Women sometimes allow work and family responsibilities to overlap in order to stay responsive to both roles. This often happens when rigid separation is not possible. For example, women may answer work calls or emails during family time. In some cases, family responsibilities are brought into the workplace, such as breastfeeding during breaks or arranging childcare near the office. Work–family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), can be linked to this, as it holds that work and family are two distinct but important roles in a person's life, and that their demands sometimes clash. When expectations from work and home overlap or require the same energy, time, dedication, and attention, it becomes difficult to perform well in both areas. On the other hand, Work-family conflict theory builds on boundary theory by showing how role conflicts arise when work and family roles are not aligned, making it hard for married working women to find a safe balance. According to role theory, there are two ways that work can get in the way of family responsibilities (for example, long hours at work delaying childcare or other household tasks) and family can get in the way of work (for example, elder care and infant care obligations getting in the way of deadlines or official travel).

These problems are worse and harder to deal with in Nepal because of patriarchal customs and unequal household responsibilities (Ann, 2018).

For this study, I have used work-family border theory to explain the dynamics in an individual's work and family spheres and to examine how working married women are treated by their husbands and other male staff members in their organizations. This theory was chosen as the primary framework for my thesis due to its specific and strong perspective and definition, particularly designed for the day-to-day experiences of married working women, and it prioritizes practical boundary management rather than merely structural interpretations of gender role theory or the result-oriented aspects of work-family conflict theory. Border theory is unique in that it focuses on people as "border-crossers" who deal with flexible boundaries (time, space, behavior) between work and family life. This directly relates to how participants deal with work at home or hire help around the house when family demands are too strict. They try to set boundaries between work and family by reducing overlap between the two. It includes setting strict work schedules, such as stopping work at a fixed time in the evening or refusing to take work calls home. On the other hand, hiring domestic help, such as maids or caretakers, also helps balance work and household duties. A key part of managing work-life balance involves negotiating with "border keepers," people who control expectations in both family and work domains. Within the family, women often need to convince husbands or in-laws that their careers are important and require time and support. In the workplace, they may need to explain their dual responsibilities to supervisors and request flexibility.

Clark (2000) states that boundary theory is a framework for work-family balance, suggesting that balance can be achieved in multiple ways depending on factors such as the similarity of the work and family domains and the strength of the boundaries between them. People function as daily "border-crossers" between work and family, navigating permeable or impermeable boundaries involving time, space, behavior, and relationships to reduce conflicts and enhance fulfillment in both areas (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Border theory suggests that individuals' cross borders daily, both physically and psychologically, as they move between work and home. According to border theory, domain members referred to as border keepers also play a role in boundary management. Balance varies according to domain congruence (such as matching values that simplify

blending), boundary permeability (flexible versus rigid), border management tactics (individual boundary establishment), and interpersonal dynamics in each realm that facilitate or hinder transitions (Ann, 2018). For example, supervisors act as border keepers within the work domain, and spouses act as border keepers within the home domain. Border keepers are involved in negotiating what constitutes a domain and where its borders lie. They may have views on what constitutes work and family, and offer varying degrees of flexibility that affect how easily individuals can cross borders to address competing work and family demand (Peng et al., 2022). For example, a supervisor may not permit personal phone calls at work or may not grant leave, when necessary, thereby preventing family interference in the work domain. To advance work-family theories, Clark (2000) proposed the work-family border theory to explain the complex interactions at the boundaries. Clark's central argument is that "individuals manage and negotiate their work and family spheres and the borders between them to attain balance" (Clark, 2000). For married women in high-pressure careers, inflexible family boundaries imposed by patriarchal demands prioritizing childcare and housework—block essential transitions like work trips or late hours, impeding promotions even for top performers (Reddy et al., 2010) Spouses and relatives, acting as "border keepers," frequently oppose boundary flexibility, elevating family obligations over career needs and thereby sustaining role overload, gradual decrease in dedication, and low career growth (Peng et al., 2022). This theory addresses how domain integration and segmentation, border creation and management, border-crosser participation, and relationships between border-crossers and others at work and at home (Clark, 2000) contribute to work-family balance.

For working married women encountering career obstacles, smooth domain integration stays challenging because of rigid segmentation, family duties conflict with work demands, and flawed border control by patriarchal "keepers" impedes key shifts like business trips. This framework aligns with the thesis objectives by showing how unsupportive relationships fuel role overload and career stagnation, shaping the study of coping methods amid childcare responsibilities and inflexible traditions. Therefore, in this study, border theory helped address concerns about work-family roles and how working women can balance work and family life.

### **Policy Review**

Nepal has a laws and organizational policies such as Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy, and labour act that prioritizes and promotes gender equality in the workplace (Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration [MoFAGA], 2021; National Law Commission [NLC], 2017). But these policies have not fully changed the way people think about gender balance in the workplace. Although Nepal has introduced several provisions and policies to promote gender equality in the workplace, these measures have not fully changed workplace attitudes. Deep patriarchal norms continue to affect the perceptions and mindset of women's roles, often leading to doubts about the efficiency and commitment of working women. In the majority of organizations, especially those led by men, women's professional competence and effectiveness are frequently questioned, despite policies that guarantee equal rights and opportunities. For example, people assume that women put family before work commitments and deadlines, even when workplace policies and regulations promise equal rights, fair remuneration, and opportunity. These differences between policy and practice show structural and cultural challenges, such as insufficient numbers of women in leadership positions. This gap between policy structure and daily practice highlights the persistent structural and cultural barriers faced by working women in Nepal.

Sexual harassment has been a major challenge faced by working women and remains a barrier to women's full participation and involvement in the labor market. Studies in Nepal and other Asian contexts indicate that women are more vulnerable to workplace harassment due to power misutilization and imbalances, male-dominated organizational structure, and weak policies. These experiences not only affect women's psychological and mental health but also affect the quality of work in jobs, career advancement, and long-term vision towards the workplace.

### **Research Gap**

Current research on work-life balance among married working women identifies key gaps that this thesis addresses, particularly by connecting participants' everyday border-management stories to concrete career impacts (Reddy et al., 2010). Much research centers on Western or generalized global settings, bypassing distinctive patriarchal practices in South Asia, such as in Nepal, even though cities are developing,

women's progress is still held back because family restrictions limit their travel, and they carry most household responsibilities. Few Nepal-focused inquiries examine urban married women's "double shift," in which traditional gender roles create an overload despite legal equality, limiting professional growth as family duties take precedence over work commitments, deadlines, or business trips. On the other hand, only a few studies use Clark's (2000) border theory. This theory shows how strict family members block flexible shifts between work and home. It forces women to overload themselves. This limits overtime, networking, and promotions when childcare comes first. This thesis fills these voids by spotlighting coping strategies despite cultural constraints

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I defined the concepts of workplace conflict and family responsibility. I followed this up with literature that sheds light on nature and manifestation, linking it to the condition of working married women. Additionally, I use the literature review to identify the research gap on the topic. Finally, I also provide the theoretical framework for the study, which is based on Clark Border theory.

## CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the study participants and provides an overview of how the research was set up, how the data were collected, how the analysis was conducted, and how the processes worked. These details make it clear how the study was set up, how the data were gathered, and how the analysis was conducted. It also discusses the people involved and the steps taken to ensure quality and moral standards were met.

### **Research Paradigm: Interpretivism**

This study adopts an influential epistemology within the interpretive framework. It explores the in-depth experiences, perceptions, and stories of married women balancing work and family lives, especially in Kathmandu. Data collection through interviews yields rich qualitative insights through an interpretive lens that emphasizes subjective and contextual realities.

In interpretive ontology, reality emerges as a subjective construct shaped by individuals' experiences, interactions, and personal meanings, rather than an objective fact. Interpretivism explains understanding of the world from people's background, experiences, and context (McGonagle et al., 2022). This method is useful for this study as work-life balance is considered context-driven, influenced by married women's backgrounds, education, and job types. It identifies how the values, beliefs, and histories of married working women shape their perceptions of work-life balance. Exploring working women's coping and balancing strategies and sense-making processes through this lens justifies an interpretive ontology, capturing the nuanced realities and lived experiences of workplace and household challenges. The circumstances of work-life balance among married working women are considered context-driven and influenced by family structures and background, workplace values, gender expectations, and cultural values. Women's realities became different based on life stage, financial condition, household, and institutional environments. These realities were accessed through participants' narratives and stories, which reveal how they experience and interpret challenges, negotiations, and adjustments across work and family domains.

Likewise, constructivism's flexible approach to building knowledge helped create a step-by-step understanding of the participants through conversation, thoughts, reflections, chats, and joint meanings. In this study, the researchers draw on their own ideas and experiences to understand participants' lives, experiences, and stories.

Constructivist epistemology enabled the researcher to adopt a subjective perspective to examine the lived realities of working married women, specifically their perceptions of work-life balance and career challenges, as well as how their surrounding context shapes these perceptions (Valencia-Contrera et al., 2025). Rather than seeking a single truth, this study acknowledges multiple realities, opinions, and perspectives, allowing women's voices to guide the interpretation of work-life balance experiences as they are lived in everyday life. This study takes a constructivist approach, meaning it sees work-life balance as something shaped by people's own experiences rather than a fixed idea. The understanding of balance comes from the personal stories of Sita, Kalpana, Sangita, and Purnima, along with the researcher's reflection on those experiences. Instead of just collecting information, the study builds meaning through this shared process. The participants' perspectives help explain how work and family boundaries are managed in the Nepali context.

This study is also guided by an interpretivist and axiology that values women's lived experiences. The researcher recognizes the importance of gender equity, which helps in selecting the topic, framing the research questions, and adopting an empathetic approach to data collection and analysis. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to minimize bias and to ensure participants' voices were represented ethically and respectfully (MacDonald, 2025).

This mix of interpretive ontology, axiology, and constructivist epistemology made it easy to collect and analyze data and could capture the real-life experience of women. The ontology focused on the unique experiences of these women, while constructivist epistemology guided the generation of knowledge through individual accounts and narratives.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

A narrative study was used as the data collection method. Narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyze, and represent people's stories as told

by them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Narrative research explores and conceptualizes human experience as represented in textual form, aiming to examine the meanings people assign to their experiences (Kim, 2016). It is a qualitative tool that is used to collect data. Memorable, interesting knowledge about the challenges married working women face and how they tackle them will be collected.

The premise of narrative inquiry is that individuals use stories to understand their lives and transform their worldview. This method sees events as stories and focuses on three main areas: temporality (past, present, and future), sociality (individual emotions and social situations), and location (specific settings) (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). It also emphasizes narrative thinking and story gathering. These parts link stories to the past, present, and future.

### **Data Collection Method**

I have adopted one-on-one interviews to collect data, encouraging working married individuals to share their experiences. This is the best technique for information collection, as it gives informants ample space to reflect (Stofer, 2019). This method enabled us to gather information from married working women and to share their experiences and feelings about work-life balance. I followed the interpretive paradigm, using my experiences to construct and interpret knowledge from gathered information. I further understand the experiences of working married women in tackling their day-to-day activities. The reflective dialogic approach was followed to question the participants in their 'natural state. Based on this framework, the study was designed within the natural environment in which people live.

In this process, I have used sources of evidence such as case stories to explore the real situation. Participants' stories, which were relevant to the research topic, were collected and presented in the report. Thus, through interviews, I have explored how challenging it is for working married women to balance their personal and professional lives and what strategies they use to cope with those challenges. These processes gave me a deeper understanding of the day-to-day experiences of married working women. Interviews showed how instructors' daily lives were changed by encounters with others. Broadening, searching, and storying/restorying are examples of analysis methods that turned participant stories into useful information (Wei, 2023).

The findings were analyzed through an interpretive paradigm, which identifies patterns and meanings in the data while respecting each participant's different perspective (Gichuru, 2017). Narrative inquiry's emphasis on participants' voices complements this paradigm's aim of exploring multiple realities.

Overall, narrative inquiry offered a robust theoretical foundation and a practical approach for investigating work-life balance among married working women.

### **Study Area and Participants**

The research was limited to the Kathmandu District. During the research, the targeted participants were working married women who had worked for at least 1 year. I interviewed 4 participants for my study.

The purpose of this study was to conduct interviews with urban working married women to obtain rich, free-ranging discourse on how current women balance work and family responsibilities. The selection criteria were as follows: the problem was related to women, and participants were female, while males were excluded. Further, those females should have worked for a minimum of 1 year, with an age range of 25 to 60 years. In this regard, Kathmandu was the research area where the participants were selected through purposive sampling. The study used purposive sampling to select participants for the qualitative research who were most relevant to the research topic.

Participants were chosen from the 25-60 age range to represent diverse career phases, spanning early- to mid-career professionals building family work routines and later-stage workers navigating shifting duties, such as raising children or caring for aging relatives.

A few candidates initially came to mind for selection. Of those eight possibilities, four proved most suitable given their fit with the study's emphasis on urban working married women managing career and family demands. Four participants were contacted with clear communication about the objective, methods, timeline, and use of the study. Once this was done, meetings with participants were held to understand the background and experience of working married women. Of the four participants, two were in their early 40s, one in their mid-30s, and one in their mid-50s.

The study captured narratives from working women in four varied professions—media/development work, banking, government service, and caregiving—to illuminate

diverse work-family tensions. This deliberate choice covered contrasting demands: media/development jobs with their creative but erratic hours; banking's rigorous, deadline-driven pace; government's predictable yet rigid frameworks; and caregiving's intimate, draining emotional labor. Such diversity strengthened the research by showing how occupational settings distinctly influence women's efforts to juggle career and home life.

### **Introduction of Participants**

#### **Sita**

Sita is a 35-year-old lady who works in the media and has a master's degree in communication. She has one child and is still working on her career while taking care of her family. Her experience shows how hard it can be to balance work, home, and being a new mother.

#### **Purnima**

Purnima is a 40-year-old woman who has worked in banking for the past 15 years. She holds a master's degree in business studies. She has one child, and her story shows how hard it can be to balance work and motherhood in an inflexible work environment. She couldn't move to her husband's workplace to maintain her career. Because the office is so strict, she often has trouble giving her child enough time, which means she must make many compromises between work and family.

#### **Sangita**

Sangita, who is 41 years old and a mother to three children with just basic schooling, suffered spousal abuse that compelled her to join the paid job for her kids' protection and to fulfill basic needs. This was not a choice; it was a matter of life and sustainability. She finally got a professional job after a lot of hard work and pressing demands, which changed her life in a big way.

#### **Kalpana**

Kalpana is 55 years old, has a master's degree, and works for the government. She is also the mother of two children. After being married, she kept working and took care of her family at the same time.

### **Story Collection**

Relevant secondary literature, past reports, established theories, and documents were thoroughly reviewed to inform both the research design and the analysis of field-collected data.

The main source of study was a one-on-one interview. These were done in person, one-on-one, in a semi-structured way. This is effective for narrative inquiry because it allows people to tell their stories in their own words (Seidman, 2013). Two of the interviews were conducted at participants' homes, and the remaining two were conducted at café settings. And some missing information was gathered through phone calls.

The interview guide was made to meet the research objectives. All interviews occurred only after participants provided informed consent. All data were collected with the participants' explicit permission. On average, the interview lasted about 2 hours for each participant. The cases presented here not only emphasize the description and interpretation of the information but also contribute to theoretical understanding.

Field notes were maintained after each formal and informal discussion. Research Questions were asked with participants' informed consent. Long-term engagement with participants was maintained through regular in-person and virtual interactions, which helped create a deeply loved experience.

The study aimed to collect detailed information about each woman's life in order to explore how work–life balance is experienced and managed by working women. Work–life balance was examined based on information participants shared during the interview process. Participants' life histories served as an important analytical lens for understanding variations in work–life balance. Many factors were found to influence work–life balance, including family background, participants' ages, coping mechanisms and strategies, and the level of social and cultural support offered to each participant. These factors were treated as independent variables shaping individual experiences of work–life balance.

### **Meaning-Making Process**

The work and family responsibilities of working married women vary, so the strategies they adopt will differ. Work and family exist in distinctive domains because each has different rules, thought patterns, and behaviors, as well as different ends and

means. Despite the differences, work and family affect each other, and people try to bring these two areas together to some degree. So, keeping in mind that the study will focus on the multiple strategies they are using to balance their work life.

I interpreted the collected information in three ways: coding, Thematic categorization, and interpretation. To identify the passage or any information that helped in the meaning-making process is known as coding. To identify the most essential information among the gathered data, coding was performed on the transcribed documents. All coded information was categorized into themes based on their nature and the demands of the study. Those codes were studied through similar lenses, yielding a singular perspective. The categorized thematic data were interpreted and analyzed through the theoretical lenses adopted by the study. The interpretation of the data helped to generate meaning in the research. In this study, using a narrative approach, the generated meaning was examined through the framework of the work-life border theory, focusing on how married working women create and manage the balance between work and family, which guided the discussion. This theory addresses how domain integration and segmentation, border creation and management, border-crosser participation, and relationships between border-crossers and others at work and at home (Clark, 2000) contribute to work-family balance.

### **Ethical Consideration**

According to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (2018), ethical research and studies require that participants be well informed about the objectives, nature, and purpose of the study, as well as the potential risks and benefits, and that they be aware of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. As a researcher and learner, I am fully aware of research ethics, and I conducted this study in accordance with them. Several steps were applied to carry out the consent process to safeguard the confidentiality of the respondents. The participants were introduced to nature, and the study's purpose was explained, including potential risks and benefits, as well as measures to ensure confidentiality. The research participants were given sufficient information about the proposed research, including information on the research procedures, their purpose, risks and discomforts, and anticipated benefits, alternative

procedures, and a statement offering the participant the opportunity to ask questions and to withdraw from the research at any time without any fear of negative consequences.

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. There is also no risk that participants will experience any uncomfortable feelings or emotions as a result of the study. No direct benefits or rewards will be provided for participation in the study.

The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were strictly maintained. I have paid special attention to safeguarding the respondents' identities and ensuring that their names, pictures, or any other forms of identity will not be revealed through any means. Participants' real names were not disclosed throughout the study, and pseudonyms were used for quotations (Saunders et al., 2015). The views and ideas of the individual participants will be used solely for research and will not be disseminated to a broader audience. Similarly, as this study involves the information gathering from working married women, I remained sensitive towards the respondents and their situation throughout the study. The questions do not contain any insensitive content that might harm participants (Berger, 2015).

### **Quality Assurance**

One aspect of the quality of qualitative research is trustworthiness. To maintain the quality and credibility of the study, I have followed a rigorous process throughout all stages of my research, from its design to fieldwork, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and finally writing. I have maintained methodological rigor throughout the design and implementation of the tools. When completing my analysis, I checked in with the respondents to ensure I interpreted the intended meaning. I conducted interviews in the natural setting. Conducting interviews in the natural setting and documenting all interactions carefully are widely recommended to capture authentic lived experiences.

All interactions were well documented and carefully analyzed. I have maintained the field notes and transcribed them thoroughly, giving every word spoken the utmost respect, capturing the feeling, and noting the settings and patterns of the events. I was well aware of how my gender, social class, ethnicity, culture, and personal values influenced my position in relation to this research and my participants.

To enhance these quality assurance techniques, the three fundamental principles of story inquiry; temporality, sociality, and spatiality as defined by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004), were incorporated throughout the study.

### **Temporality**

People's lives and experiences unfold over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004), linking past, present, and future. The concept of temporality holds that events from the past shape what we do now and carry forward to influence what comes next. Throughout this study, temporality front and center, i.e., time, change, and life stages, were followed in shaping research questions, interactions, interviews, and analysis.

### **Sociality**

Sociality urges story researchers to create relationships with participants in a mindful way, respecting their feelings and emotions, not just in talks but also in analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). That's why it took time to build relationships at first: engagement with participants was done many times, and we learnt about their views and ideas to get a better, more human sense of who they were and really understand each person's personality.

### **Place**

Place is an important environment in the formation of memories and how they influence people's behavior (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). In narrative research, the importance of place requires sustained attention throughout data collection and analysis to maintain the integrity of the study (Czyżowska & Gurba, 2021). To understand something, you also need to know where it happened. Places affect how people react, especially how they solve problems. This study examined the influence of places and situations on participants' challenges in work and at home.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the methodology used and the study's area of coverage. A qualitative approach, a narrative inquiry, was used as a data-gathering technique. The research was limited to Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC). The study's targeted participants were working married women. A total of four participants were interviewed. The entire process was conducted in accordance with quality assurance and ethical standards.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHALLENGES OF BALANCING HOUSEHOLD WORK AND JOB

This chapter captures the stories of married women as they entered the paid workforce, focusing on their social, economic, and personal backgrounds, and is structured around the challenges they face as working married women.

#### **Sita -Finding Herself through Work -Juggling Dreams and Duties**

Sita, who was 35 years old, said that her career is an important aspect of her life narrative. Talking about her jobs, she added:

*Ten years ago, I entered the working world, when getting a job and making money seemed like a natural and possible thing to do. At that time, it wasn't hard for me to find a job that fit her education and skills. I started working as a fact-checker, a role that requires strong focus, responsibility, and dedication. The position required me to be accurate and pay attention, which made me feel both challenged and inspired.*

Sita can still clearly remember her first day on the job. She was both excited and scared as she sat quietly at her desk. *“I kept looking around the office, trying to understand everything where to go, who to ask, what was expected of me. It was all so new,”* she recalled. The office, the people, the whole setting, the daily rituals, and the unspoken conventions of professional life were unfamiliar to her. She didn't know what the future would hold, but she was proud of herself at the same time. *“For the first time, I felt like I had stepped into a world I had always dreamed of, but I was happy I was there,”* she said. Even though she was apprehensive, she felt a powerful sense of accomplishment just being there. *“It felt like the start of something big, a door opening to possibilities I hadn't imagined before.”*

In those early years, work felt like a real chance to find purpose, community, and independence, not the heavy burden it would later become. People didn't take jobs because they were desperate; they did it because they were excited about the chance to learn new things, meet new people, and make a stable place for themselves in the world. It was a time when employment had real significance, and people didn't have to worry

about exploitation or insecurity all the time. At that point in her life, Sita didn't have any trouble juggling work. She didn't have any domestic chores that took up much of her time or energy, nor any extra roles that required her attention. *"I could focus fully on my work, learn new things, and grow without feeling pulled in different directions,"* she noted. She had plenty of time to learn new skills and improve her job performance. If a task required it, she could stay late at the workplace. The workday finished at 5 p.m., but the evenings were still open. *"Even after office hours, I could plan for the next day, review my work, or just sit quietly and think it gave me a sense of control and freedom,"* she reflected. She was able to take a break, organize and manage her day-to-day tasks, and get prepared for another day without feeling pressured or stressed.

Sita recalled how her family's support shaped her view of her career. *"Both my mom and dad worked,"* she recalled, *"So from a very young age, I knew that earning money wasn't just about survival it was about independence and self-respect."* Watching her parents, she understood that labor was never a burden, even for women. *"At home, no one ever said work was only for men or that women should stay at home. They believed that every person, especially a woman, should aim to have a good job and be financially independent. That idea stayed with me my whole life,"* she explained.

Her parents never pressured her to follow a particular path or asked her what career she wanted. Instead, they encouraged her to give her best at whatever she chose. *"They always said, 'Do your best, and we will support you,'"* she remembers. That confidence in her abilities gave her the courage to dream big. *"I was aware that my parents believed in me, and that made me do my work seriously. I wanted to make them proud and prove to myself that I could achieve more,"* she added.

Looking back, Sita realizes that the early days of her career were unusually smooth. *"Everything was going in my favor,"* she said. Her parents offered moral and emotional support, she didn't have to worry about household chores, and her job provided her with the chance to learn and grow. *"I could go to work with joy, curiosity, and confidence. I didn't have to think about balancing work with other roles, yet work itself was my world, and I could pour all my energy into it,"* she reflected. This early experience teaches her to be confident and determined in her career. Sita added:

*Those first several years of work were important for me. It changed my perception of work, responsibility, and independence. I was not aware of how my life would change in the coming days, but it did give me a good opportunity and the start of my profession. Looking back, today I recall that time was full of ease and freedom. It gave me the capacity and freedom to work confidently without working on any household responsibilities.*

When Sita was 28, she got married. She and her husband lived in Kathmandu, but his parents and other family members lived in Jhapa. The distance made her feel a little freedom. She was learning to adjust to her new life. She thought she could keep working while slowly getting used to being married. Life was busy, but everything was fine. There was pressure, but it wasn't too much yet. Sita's marriage at 28 marked a shift in Nepal's changing marriage patterns, as urban professional women began marrying later than the usual age of 17 to 22, though family pressures lingered. Living apart from her husband's parents and relatives gave her some space at first.

Sita's life changed after she got married. Just two months after her marriage, she became pregnant. She was both thrilled and nervous about this. Sita said, *"I got pregnant only two months after I got married. I had already given birth to her child by the time I had been married for a year. Fear and happiness came together."* She further added that she had a great time throughout this time of her life, but being a mom takes a lot of energy. Her body altered, she couldn't sleep well, and her days were all about taking care of the baby. Her life changed drastically when she became a mother. She was tired from sleepless nights, changes in her body, and always taking care of her child. But she adored those first few moments. Sita was happy when her in-laws came to Kathmandu to help with the baby. Sita's in-laws travelled from Jhapa to Kathmandu to help her take care of her child and herself while she was recovering and not getting enough sleep. They helped with feeding, bathing, and calming the baby. Sita felt a flood of relief and thankfulness. She regularly reminded herself how lucky she was, as so many city mothers had to do it all on their own without family help. She told herself she was lucky because many ladies didn't get any help.

Sita's in-laws from Jhapa took care of her newborn baby as she recovered after giving birth. This gave her body and mind time to heal. Once she recovered, she returned

to work in Kathmandu without any problems. She felt good knowing that the baby was secure with them. This period made her feel relieved, as she received help from her in-laws to take care of her child and reduce her stress in balancing work responsibilities. Things seemed okay at first. Sita could go to work knowing that her child was being cared for from nine to five. But after five, she had to take care of everything again. She arrived home tired from work and had to start another round of chores. She spent her evenings cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the house. There was no time to relax between work and household work. She didn't have time to rest. No one realized how exhausted she was since she kept doing things quietly. Sita said:

*The nights were especially hard for me as a breastfeeding mother. I woke up a lot, and my sleep was never complete. My body was always fatigued, and my mind was never totally at ease. My mind kept going even when I lay down. I was anxious about my baby, my work, and myself. I got used to being tired all the time.*

As a development worker in Kathmandu's bustling NGO sector, Sita managed projects and strict deadlines. She quit work the moment she stepped home from the office, setting aside her laptop and letting emails pile up unanswered amid official deadlines. Her in-laws' gentle yet firm expectations took hold as soft reminders that the house and baby came first, their glances conveying that true devotion meant full presence for family over any glowing screen. She stopped working after office hours. She couldn't use her laptop and couldn't reply to her emails or other official communications. Her home and her child became her first priority. Her mind was still split even when she was completing chores around the house. She felt bad about not spending enough time on her job. She felt like she couldn't do either work or family properly.

Almost two years later, a well-known company in Jhapa, her husband's birthplace, offered Sita a position. She was confused. If she took the position, she would have to leave her spouse in Kathmandu and live with her in-laws. She also understood that, as a daughter-in-law, she was responsible for household duties, including caring for the house. But she took the job immediately because she thought it would boost her career. She also thought that living with her in-laws would make it easier for her to care for the baby while breastfeeding, even though she would still have to fulfill household responsibilities.

It was very difficult to decide as she was leaving her husband behind, taking the child with her, and doing everything on her own for the sake of her job and career. She recalls that she wouldn't have travelled to another district with her son and wouldn't have taken the job if her in-laws were not in that same city.

Some things got easier. She didn't have to worry about childcare every day, and her child was always with family. But new problems also arose. The family was bigger, and the expectations were high. As time went on, being a professional woman became less important to her than being a daughter-in-law. Her duties didn't end when she got off work. There was no clear line between work and home, and it was hard to find time to relax. Sita's work in the development sector required sudden field visits, which often affect her daily routine. It was not a problem when she was unmarried and had no children. These demands frequently clash with family responsibilities, especially in the evenings. Living with in-laws increased household duties and expectations, including timely preparation of meals, childcare, care for elders, and other household responsibilities. Over time, these responsibilities led her to focus on or give reasonable time to her professional role. Sometimes work-related emails, calls, and messages continued after office hours, while household duties left her with little time to rest, making it challenging to achieve work–life balance.

When Sita's child was seventeen months old, she went on her first field trip away from home. This was a very emotional turning point in her career. She said that the separation was very difficult, and she cannot forget that moment. She felt really guilty, but she didn't say anything about it, which is how married women often deal with emotional pain by keeping it to themselves. She felt bad about leaving her child but staying at home and not doing her job was just as bad. She felt guilty but didn't say anything. It hurt to take a step away from her child, but it also hurt to hold back. She was split between wanting to work and loving her child. There was no choice that seemed right. Sita couldn't choose between wanting to work and loving her child. But her personal troubles didn't stop her from doing her job well. Even though many of them didn't have the same care obligations, their performance was continually monitored and compared with that of other staff members. She thought she had to prove how dedicated

she was because she was scared that any interruption or decline in output would be perceived as a sign of insincerity.

Sita began to feel like she was losing herself as time went on. Her dreams looked less and less possible, and she became less and less excited as she had to deal with job and household duties. She thought about whether it was possible to work and take care of her family at the same time. She keeps on going to work because she is dedicated to it and because taking a break doesn't seem like a good option. Like many married women, she worked hard to reconcile her paid career with her unpaid household obligations.

During this time, she was not formally employed, but she spent much of it reflecting on her experiences. She had faced heavy work pressure, strong family expectations, and the challenge of balancing motherhood with field-based responsibilities. These experiences left a lasting mark on her life. When she returned to Kathmandu, she had a clearer understanding of her limits, inner strength, and priorities.

These experiences shaped how she saw herself, her work, and her family life. The challenges were difficult, but they helped her better understand the problems married women face at work. The story of Sita is not about failure; it's about not giving up in difficult times. It illustrates the experience of many women, in which their professional aspirations are shaped by both personal objectives and societal expectations. Sita sometimes felt that she was losing herself. She felt that her dreams were far away, and her enthusiasm slowly dissipated. She wondered whether she could keep up with both her career and her family. She kept going to work because it was easy, but also because she could never take a break. Many married women have similar problems, but their work, both at home and outside, often goes unnoticed.

### **Purnima-Struggling to Balance -Work, Motherhood, and Distance**

When Purnima was 23, she started working at a bank. Recalling her entry to the job, she said:

*I had just finished my bachelor's degree and was hoping to get the job. I applied for my first job at a bank and was selected on my first try. My parents were happy to hear this news, especially my father, who had worked in banking and whose father had done the same. Working in the same area felt like a continuation of the family heritage.*

It was hard for Purnima to start her career while earning her master's degree, but she did so with determination. Purnima said:

*I used to wake up early in the morning. I would wake up at 4:30 a.m., get ready by 5:00 a.m., and go to college by 6:00 a.m. I would hurry to go to the bank right after class, which finished at 9:00 a.m. The office was open from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and I often got there just in time.*

She laughs now when she thinks of those winter mornings, when the cold was so biting that getting out of bed felt almost impossible. *“Some days, I just stayed under the blanket and thought, maybe I’ll skip college today,”* she recalled with a smile. Yet, she never did it for long. At that time, Purnima was fully focused on her studies and work. *“I didn’t have household chores to worry about, so I could give all my energy to studying, preparing for exams, and learning as much as I could at work,”* she said.

Those days were not easy; her family's love and support made the hard moments more manageable. *“I remember my father telling me, ‘You’ve handled challenges before, and you can do it again,’”* she explained. *“His words gave me confidence and let me realize that I was capable, no matter how challenging and difficult the situation was.”*

During this time, she also figures out the importance of managing her time carefully. *“I had to learn how to split my hours between college and work. There were no shortcuts,”* she said. She developed the ability to focus fully on her professional tasks while maintaining her studies. *“It taught me how to do multiple things at once, stay organized, and know what mattered most at any given moment,”* she added. That period was tough, but it helped her be efficient and disciplined, also enhanced her confidence and strength.

Purnima remembers that time as both tiring and interesting. She recalls, *“There were days when I used to feel completely exhausted running from college to work and trying to balance work and study. But at the same time, I felt active and eager to learn new things in the office.”* She was not supposed to do any household work and could focus completely on herself and her work. She continues, *“I was able to focus on learning new skills at work, getting ready for my assignments, and thinking about what I want for my future without any distractions.”*

Her early career shows that continuous hard work and determination are the keys to professional growth. Purnima recalls, *"I remember thinking, 'If I can handle this now, I can handle anything that comes next.'"* She had a clear objective, her family was always there for her, and she wanted to make the most of each day. She remembers her parents telling her, *"Take one step at a time, but don't stop moving forward."* With this mix of dedication and support, she felt ready to begin her career and confront the challenges ahead. It also helped her prepare for the challenges of balancing work, school, and, eventually, family responsibilities.

At 27, Purnima got married. She added;

*I was happily married and living with my husband's family. From the start of my marriage, my husband had to go on fieldwork a lot. I was used to this schedule at first. I would go to my mother's place when my husband was out of the valley because I felt safer and more relaxed there. It helped me feel better and more relaxed, since I had to leave for work at 8:30 a.m. and stay until 6:00 p.m. Going to my mother's house was the easiest way to take care of myself. I felt less stressed out when she stayed at my mother's place because I didn't have to worry about chores in the morning.*

But when she stayed at her in-laws' house, she found it difficult to balance her job and household responsibilities. However, over time, Purnima learned to handle both of her duties, but it was never easy. This routine was more than just keeping things in order; it showed how difficult it is for married women to balance their work and personal life. On the one hand, the wife was expected to keep peace in the house and take care of the family while the husband was away; on the other hand, she had to keep up with her work duties.

Purnima added;

*When I first got married, I realized that work-life balance isn't something you can choose; it's negotiated and shaped by your family background, what society expects of you, and your job. Even small things that used to matter, such as where to stay when my husband is out of the home, were important. This shows where married women are continuously trying to find a balance between their duties, tasks, and personal desires.*

Purnima got pregnant three years after she got married. At the same time, her husband received a good job opportunity in Dhangadhi and moved there to take it. This period was both pleasant and hard for her. It gave her better career options for his husband and hope for the future, but it also made her daily life feel hard and uncertain.

Purnima had to do many new things on her own while her husband was away. She got used to living at her parents' house for most of the time, going to the doctor, and getting ready for the arrival of their child. Her experience indicates that major life changes, like pregnancy, can make it harder for women to move for a job, which is usually the hardest thing for them to do. She said that it would have been impossible for her to accept any job demands to move to the city during the pregnancy. This illustrates that barriers for married women exist across society and in day-to-day work environments.

Besides Family dynamics, Purnima added that working in banking is hard. She had to meet official targets, goals, deadlines, and deal with customer care and concerns. The office staff usually compared teams, which made everyone feel they had to outdo their peers. Mental strength was also important, including being able to handle what clients throw at you and staying calm when things got tough. In this context, personal problems were rarely recognized, as the main focus was on getting things done fast, correctly, and on time.

Purnima added;

*I was going through a very hard time at this point. I mostly had to deal with my pregnancy and other duties on my own. Though there was support from my parents, there was. The office still expected a lot from my role, and my pregnancy didn't change that. Even though I was pregnant and physically weak in some points of time, the office expectations stayed the same. There was no choice but to work from home, no flexible hours, and not much understanding of my illness. People expected me to meet the targets, work long hours, and maintain the same pace as before. This lack of flexibility made my pregnancy physically and emotionally draining.*

Purnima had three months of maternity leave after giving birth. This time helped her to recover and adjust to motherhood; however, she was still anxious about returning

to work. She knew that the demand for her work would be the same, and that balancing job expectations with her new responsibilities as a mother would be challenging.

Fortunately, she had support from her husband and family, which made the postpartum period more manageable. Though her husband was not physically present, he offered emotional and moral support and tried to take a break from his work to travel back to Kathmandu. Her family helped her with household responsibilities and took care of the child, allowing her to focus on her health post-delivery and bond with her baby, giving her the space and courage to face the pressures of her workplace again.

Returning to the office after maternity leave was one of the most challenging periods for Purnima. She was worried, guilty, and anxious at the same time about leaving her four-month-old child at home. Taking care of a newborn and breastfeeding are both physically and emotionally difficult times, and immediately, as she must resume her office, she had to split her time between work and her baby. Staying late at work made these feelings worse because she was anxious and worried about her child at home. She felt quite unhappy when she had to stay late at work and leave her child at home. Thankfully, her parents were very helpful. They took care of both the child and the housework while she was with them. Purnima relied heavily on this family's support to adjust to her new life because her spouse was still working away from home. With their help, she had some time to arrange her days and figure out how to satisfy her job's obligations while still taking care of her child. This helped her focus on how to balance her job and take care of her child.

This time highlights the challenges many working mothers face, particularly in organizations with rigid schedules and high expectations. Even with supportive family networks, balancing a demanding job with childcare requires constant balance and negotiation, emotional resilience, and careful time management. Purnima's experience explains that family support is very important in helping women handle the early months of motherhood while balancing their professional roles. It also highlights how workplace policies, such as flexible hours or time management for breastfeeding, could make this transition less stressful and more balanced for mothers returning to work.

Her child was happy living with his grandparents, but he always wanted her to help him with his homework and take him on outings. Purnima added, "*My son always*

*waits for me to complete his homework. Once I return from the office, the first thing I check is my child's diary and allocate time to make him do his homework.*" These little things reminded Sita of her two jobs and made her appreciate the time she could spend with him.

After their child turned 4, Purnima's husband returned to Kathmandu because his work posting had been shifted. Her husband made her life a little simpler by helping with household duties and taking care of their child. It was a relief for Purnima. This period shows how important it is to have a spouse's support when working mothers face significant stress, both emotional and physical. But this stability didn't last long. A year later, her husband got a nice job offer in another country. This was a major step forward in his career, but it also made things harder for Purnima. She asked him to reject the job offer, but she also couldn't leave her job in Nepal, as she had worked very hard to build up, which gave her a sense of independence and professional identity. Purnima could not travel with him as she had a permanent job here in Kathmandu; she had to handle the challenges of balancing work, childcare, and domestic responsibilities primarily on her own again. Purnima decided to stay in Nepal and take care of her child, knowing it would take a lot of her time, energy, and effort to meet expectations and be a good mother. She knew that things would be hard, but she was determined to take care of both her job and her child, even if it meant doing most of the work herself.

This experience explains the negotiations that married women often face between their own careers and their spouses' careers. Even with a supportive partner, women often face social constraints that limit their mobility and choices about where to live. Purnima's situation also highlights the intersection of professional ambition and family responsibilities: she had to navigate her desire for career continuity while managing the stress of a long-term separation from her spouse. Her story reflects a broader pattern among working mothers, where personal and professional decisions are constantly intertwined and constrained by societal expectations, family needs, and workplace rigidity.

### **Sangita- Struggle to Survive and Silent Burdens**

When Sangita started working as a laborer for pay at 25 years old, she is 40 years old now and has three kids. She explained, *"I didn't want to make a career; I had to work*

*to stay alive.*" At that point, her life wasn't about getting things done or progressing up in her job; it was about staying alive. "I used to worry every day about how I would be able to take care of my children; how would I be able to fulfill their basic needs and keep them safe," she said.

Having three dependent children significantly increased Sangita's daily challenges. Her main job at home was to care for her kids and handle the tasks that kept the house running. *"I spent my days cooking, cleaning, helping take care of the kids, and making sure they had everything they needed,"* she added. But things grew worse between her and her husband over time. He didn't help her with money or feelings, and his behavior got worse day by day. *"He started drinking more often, and then the yelling and hitting started,"* Sangita said. The house that should have been a safe place for her and her kids turned out to be a place of worry, fear, and mistrust. She added, *"I get scared of my husband and staying at home," she said, her voice full of memories.*

Sangita's decision to work was no longer just about getting by outside the house; it became a lifeline for her and her kids, a way for her to feel she had some control in a dangerous, unpredictable situation. "I was so tired, but I knew my kids would be hurt if I didn't go to work. That kept me going." She explained, Sangita said:

*I was in an abusive relationship and was also having trouble with money." It was hard to live at my husband's house. He used to get drunk and hit me. The violence wasn't just one event; it got worse over time. The weights got heavier every day. She put up with the abuse in silence for years, expecting that things would get better, especially for her kids' sake. But instead of getting better, things got worse.*

Sangita finally let go of her attachment. She said it was a time when she knew she couldn't take it anymore. She said, *"It got to be too much to handle over time."* After going through more pain than she thought she could handle, she made a choice that would change her life forever. She took her three kids and left her husband. It wasn't an easy decision. She was afraid to leave because it meant losing the little security she had. But staying meant more violence and pain. She said simply, *"It was hard and hurt to leave, but staying was worse than leaving."*

Sangita's life became uncertain once she and her husband split up. She had three kids that depended on her completely, but she didn't have much to rely on herself. During

this time of trouble, help came from an unexpected source. A family in her area let Sangita and her kids reside with them.

The family couldn't give her money, but they did let her stay with them. That little act of compassion made a big difference. Sangita and her kids felt safe sleeping in a safe location while everything else felt unstable. It helped her calm her fears, clear her head, and start making plans for what to do next. She was now able to stop and think about what to do next for the first time in a long time.

Sangita decided to look for a job that compensated her during this period. Work was not her choice; it was her need. It was about staying alive, keeping her kids away from hunger, and keeping them safe from the unknown. She never thought about working for money, but she had no other choice. Sangita began reconstructing her life, one step at a time, through hard work, bravery, and determination. She wasn't motivated by ambition, but by her love for her children and her sense of duty. Therefore, she began working in the informal sector. She found work as a daily laborer, a role that has its own set of challenges. The job was hard on her body and didn't pay well, but she did it nevertheless since her kids needed her. The work was physically challenging, with long hours. You must work under the sun or in any weather conditions without compromising. Payment was not certain, and she had to negotiate wages or rely on daily earnings, which were hardly enough to cover basic needs. There was no social security, no sick leave, and no guarantee that she would have work the next day. On top of this, she had to struggle through household responsibilities, childcare, and emotional labor, all without any support from her spouse. She never believed she would have to do that kind of work, but it was the only thing she could do at the time. She left work early every day, taking not only her tools but also the fear she had for her children at home. One of the hardest things she had to do that day was lock the door and leave her kids alone for hours. Even when she was working, she always thought about them and worried about their safety. Her working hours usually ended at five in the evening. When Sangita returned home, she was tired, but she still had many household chores to do. She still had to prepare for the next day, do laundry, help her kids with their homework, and cook. She didn't get to rest too often. She did the same tedious things every day: work, worry, and fulfill her duties. She earned enough money to cover her daily expenses. There was nothing left to save,

and it looked like planning for the future was impossible. Every morning brought new questions. There was no way to know for sure that she would have to work the next day. If she were replaced, even for one day, she would lose money immediately.

Sangita didn't give up, even though circumstances were hard. She said, "My kids were the main thing that kept me going during those times." *I continued going even though I was tired because I thought of their future. For me, employment was more than just a way to make money.*" She thought of working to show affection and make sacrifices. Every sore muscle and hard hour was connected to her wish that her kids would have a better life than she did.

Some of her worst unpleasant memories relate to food. She added: *"I still remember when I could only buy a little food for my kids and how my kids used to sleep without eating proper food"*. Some nights, her kids went to bed hungry because there wasn't enough food. They would come home from school at about four in the afternoon and wait quietly for her to arrive. She used to reach home at five in the evening, tired and exhausted, and then she started cooking. That one meal used to be their dinner, as they couldn't have snacks or extra food in between lunch and dinner. They were used to it and learned to deal with hunger.

Sangita's life went on like this until she met someone by chance who changed everything. She met a woman one day who was looking for a house caretaker in Kathmandu through formal means. Sangita was interested in the chance. It gave her steady work, better conditions, and a more stable income. Taking the decision wasn't easy. She had to leave her area, the few people she knew and trusted, and go to a city she had never been to before when she moved to Kathmandu. She thought about it a lot and decided to take the chance since she thought it would be better for her kids' future.

In Kathmandu, Sangita worked as a house caretaker. The work was still demanding, but the place was safer and more structured. She felt safer and more respected than she had before. It was hard to get acclimated to living in a new place, and there were times when she felt lonely and lost. But this change also made her feel more confident in herself. She felt stronger and more confident as she lived alone and did her own things in a new environment.

Now Sangita considers this time as a turning point. Although the journey was challenging, with so many sacrifices and hardships, it also made her realize how strong she was. She faced the tough circumstances with patience and dignity, building a better future for her children.

Despite these challenges, Sangita looked each day with dedication and courage. She began to relive her life, slowly, relying on hard work and courage. Her motivation was not career growth; it was her love and responsibility towards her children. Early morning and late evening, every physically demanding task was motivated by the objective of ensuring her children's future. Sangita's experience highlights the harsh nature of informal labor for women, especially single mothers with multiple children. It shows how vulnerabilities, lack of social protection, and societal expectations contribute to day-to-day challenges.

### **Kalpana- Difficult Transition to Homemaker to a Government Worker**

Kalpana, now 55, mother of two children, recalls the early years of her marriage and the decisions she made then. She remembers that when she got married, working outside the home was never part of her plan. She said:

*I got married when I was twenty-four. At that time, I didn't want to work outside the house. Like many women, I agreed that my major job would be to take care of the house. I thought that getting married meant I had to take care of the house. I thought that her only job would be to be a wife and then a mother.*

During the first few years of her marriage, Kalpana was not involved in any formal job. She remembers that her days were full of cooking, cleaning, and making sure everything at home worked well from morning to night. She had more responsibilities once she had a baby. She said, *"Most of my time was spent taking care of the baby—feeding, bathing, and calming her down when she cried."* At that point, Kalpana had no questions about this plan. It felt natural because that's how life was for most women in our community

She didn't decide to look for a paying job until she was thirty-one. Her husband had a big influence on her decision to start a career; he was the one who asked her to apply for the job. Kalpana added:

*My husband always had faith in me. He always used to tell me that I can balance both work and family. He encourages me to work and follow my dreams. His help provided me the courage to take that initial step toward getting a job, even though she had been focused only on my family for years.”*

Kalpana further added

*I remember the day I got my first paycheck. It felt like a small win, not just for me, but for everything I had done at home. I figured out that I could handle my duties at home and at work if I wanted to.*

Kalpana's spouse was a businessman who thought differently from most of the guys in their society. He thought that Kalpana should stay busy outside the home, even though many believed a married woman's role was only in the home. He told her to look for work from the start and backed her choices. Kalpana's perception of herself changes progressively as he began to trust her skills. She said, *"I started to believe in myself because he believed in me. His encouragement made me able to accept that working outside the home is possible."*

Kalpana's husband told her to look for a job, so she did. She was especially interested in working for the government since it offered stability, respect from others, and long-term security. But getting ready for government tests wasn't easy. She had to study while still taking care of her kids and keeping up with her household duties. She said:

*There were times when I was tired and confused. I also felt pressure from my friends. People would ask me why I had to work after I got married and had kids. These questions often made me doubt myself, but my husband was there for me emotionally and practically, which helped me keep going.*

Kalpana had a hard time balancing her job with her housework. Her days normally started early because she had two kids. Kalpana's experience explains the daily reality for many working mothers: the invisible labor of maintaining a household and employment, yet it is rarely recognized. Her story highlights the emotional and physical stages of this dual responsibility and underscores how societal expectations about women's roles in both the home and workplace can make achieving work-life balance extremely challenging. She added:

*I used to wake up at four in the morning to do most of my work before the rest of the family woke up. When it was peaceful in the early morning, I did my morning rituals, made breakfast, and got everything ready for the day. I was ready to go to work by seven in the morning.*

Kalpana's work at home didn't stop when she got home from work in the afternoon. She cooked for her family and kids, her elderly in-laws, and took care of their needs. She was physically and mentally fatigued because she worked long hours at home and at work. Her husband was morally supportive, but he didn't help her much with cooking and household chores. As she lived in a joint family, she was supposed to handle most of the household work.

Kalpana had further problems at work. She often had a lot of work to do and not much time to do it, which made it hard for her to keep her professional and personal life in harmony. Some of her coworkers were worried that her family duties would come in the way of her work, which was a type of gender bias. Women are taken to be less competent, committed, or capable simply because they are wives, mothers, or caregivers. Such perceptions added extra pressure, making Kalpana feel she needed to prove herself, not just against professional circumstances but also against societal expectations about women's roles and responsibilities. She said, *"Sometimes I missed crucial business meetings or training sessions because of my family obligations, which made me feel more guilty and nervous."*

Kalpana had a lot of work to do, but she also had another goal: to continue her education so she could get a raise at her job. Kalpana joined her classes, completed her bachelor's degree, applied for promotion, and, fortunately, was promoted. However, it was not an easy task to manage work, home, and study. She added that:

*Going back to studying meant working more and giving up things. I usually studied late at night, after I had finished all my household work, or during the few times when I could be alone and free at the office or at home. It was challenging to balance school, work, and time with family. There were times when I couldn't handle the tension.*

However, Kalpana didn't give up, even though she was exhausted and things were hard. She earned her degree and was promoted. Her experience demonstrates how

education can serve as a pathway for women to overcome workplace barriers, though it often comes at the cost of additional pressure and limited rest. She had a lot going on with work, school, housework, and stress at work, but she was determined to make things better for herself and her family. Kalpana's daily life is remarkably similar to that of many married professional women who juggle many tasks at once without receiving recognition for it.

### **Interpretation**

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana show how married women can find work and how their lives might change as a result. Sita's job here shows how working can help you learn more about yourself and feel better about yourself. She didn't have to do many chores around the house when she first started working because her family helped her. It showed how family support can help in boosting careers (Beagan, Etowa, & Gilbert et al., 2012). Purnima's story shows us how to be strong and do more. She did this by working hard, being driven, and balancing her academics and her job. Getting motivated by her father's journey and accomplishing better at work (Crozier & Reay, 2011). Sangita, on the other hand, had to work since she was having difficulties with money, and her husband was abusing her. Her top goals were to keep herself and her kids safe and alive (Benería & Roldán, 2017). This means that working hard and honestly can help you overcome challenges and become stronger and more confident. Kalpana's story shows how having a spouse who is there for you can improve your life. Her marriage helped her navigate cultural expectations, and later in life, she was able to work for the government, which helped her achieve her goals in both her personal and professional lives.

These stories highlight the role of social and familial networks in women's career advancement (Dever & Karami, 2021). These examples indicate that many factors can affect how women feel about their jobs, including their interests, the stage of life they are in, the support they receive from others, and the culture and society in which they live.

The experiences of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana illustrate the difficulty married women face in balancing the boundaries between work and family life, as outlined by Border Theory. The Theory suggests that work and family are separate domains, each with its own demands, responsibilities, rules, and expectations, and that

the person must constantly negotiate the boundaries between them. For these women, the boundaries between work and home were rigid or unequal, making it difficult to balance day-to-day life.

### **Mixing Roles Increases Conflict**

Sita's story shows how fewer boundaries between home and work increased stress. Living with in-laws while taking care of a young child, she was expected to fulfill family responsibilities without reducing any workplace demands. The type of work she is engaged in demands more time and commitment, including ad hoc meetings and field visits, making it difficult to separate work from family life and forcing her to make difficult compromises, such as leaving her breastfeeding child back home for weeks (Clark, 2000). Sita's story explains that the boundaries between work and family are as flexible as walls, protected and surrounded by people like husbands, bosses, and family rules.

### **Motherhood, Inflexible Work Structures**

On the other hand, Purnima's story highlights how being a mother and having inflexible work schedules can make it challenging to balance work and family life. Her job didn't change when she was pregnant or after she had the baby. Her parents and husband helped her with the kids and gave her emotional support, but she still had to do most of the work while working at a bank, which was stressful. Her experience shows that many businesses depend on family help rather than making it easier for women to work. A relationship between border-crossers and others at work and home influences work/family balance. Her job offered no flexible working hours, fixed shifts, and unchanged postpartum—turning daily crossings into overload as home demands (chores, baby care) flooded unbuffered work time. Parents' hands-on support and her husband's remote emotional lift served as family amplifiers, temporarily expanding the home's domain, per Clark. Therefore, in the cases of Sita and Purnima, emotional and practical support from parents or husbands helped reduce immediate pressure, but it did not reduce the underlying gendered expectations. Women continued to bear the primary responsibility for household chores and childcare, leading to role addition rather than role reduction. Workplace environments across the narratives were largely segregated, with rigid, limited flexibility. Purnima's office doesn't offer flexible hours during pregnancy or

after childbirth. These conditions reflect that the caregiving responsibilities are treated as private matters rather than organizational concerns. Consequently, women were required to internalize conflict and rely on personal or family resources to sustain employment.

### **Work for Survival**

Sangita faced a different and difficult situation. As a single mother, she worked to survive rather than to grow her career. Informal daily wage work as a boundary between work and home, offering less security or stability. Her story highlights how economic constraints make it even harder for women to balance caregiving and paid work. It highlights how economic weakness reshapes a woman's life. Unlike the other participants, she decided to work in order to survive rather than for career growth.

### **Juggling Work, Care, and Education**

Kalpana's story shows how hard it is to juggle many roles at once. She had a lot of work to do household chores, taking care of her children and elderly in-laws, and further study to get a promotion and more opportunities. Despite limited time, exhaustion, and gender bias at work, she continued to invest in her professional growth. Her experience shows how women often have to put in extra effort to prove their commitment and ability in both work and family life (Clark, 2000). Kalpana's story explains how women often respond to constrained environments. Balancing work, caregiving, and further education, she continued to pursue professional growth despite lots of challenges. While this persistence reflects hard work and determination, it also reveals a deeper reality: women must always overperform to be recognized in both family and work domains.

Therefore, these stories show that working married women face many challenges and difficulties at work, at home, and within society, often with limited institutional support. While these women demonstrate strength and adaptability, their experiences point to the need for better workplace policies and more shared responsibility at home to support work–life balance.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the stories of the four participants on how they entered paid work. The chapter ends by presenting the interpretation of the stories. The narrative showed how their personal, family, and social backgrounds shape their professional journeys. This chapter presents stories about the challenges they face while balancing

both work and life. The chapter ends by presenting the interpretation of the stores. The narrative highlighted the challenges of household chores, caring for children, workforce demand, and societal expectations.

## CHAPTER V

### DEVELOPMENT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES

This chapter will show the narrative stories structured around the mitigation strategies applied by working married women to cope with the challenges they face.

#### **Sita-Finding Balance -Keeping Self**

Sita had a hard time being a mom and working at the same time. She remembers when the days were so long, the work never stopped, and it was hard to find time for both work and home.

Even during the hard days at home, Sita could manage her work because she had support at the office. She was able to continue working because her workplace provided support. Her colleagues were cooperative, her supervisor was patient, and the office culture allowed understanding. *She added, "My coworkers were kind, my boss was patient, and the workplace itself was understanding."*

Flexible attitudes at work, such as understanding when she needed time for family responsibilities and not questioning her commitment, helped her stay employed. At the same time, the support she received at home helped her manage household duties and childcare. Together, these two forms of support created a sense of balance that enabled her to move forward.

Sita recalled, *"Combined with the help I got at home, it felt like I could finally balance both worlds."* She pauses thoughtfully and added, *"But to be honest, it was never completely steady. Some days were easier than others, and sometimes the balance would tip, but having that support made the journey much more manageable."*

She added:

*My husband was there for me and helped me get through the hard times. Even though he didn't say much, he helped me keep my work and home life in harmony. He didn't fix all my problems, but he was there for me, listened to me talk about them, and realized how tired I was. He convinced and encouraged me, which made me feel like I wasn't the only one.*

Sita remembers those days clearly. She said with a smile on her face:

*My husband would call me regularly, just to check if I was managing okay or if I had any troubles. During his breaks from work, he would come all the way to Jhapa just to take care of our baby. Knowing he was there made me feel so much more relaxed and comfortable. I could travel for fieldwork without worrying about my child, which was a great relief.*

Sita's experience shows that managing work and family is not always about being stable and strong; it's about having systems of support that help women get through tough and challenging times. When there is understanding at home and at work, the load is lighter, even if the problems are the same.

When her assignment in Jhapa ended, Sita returned to Kathmandu to live with her husband again. *“Our child was five years old by then, and life had started to feel a little more manageable,”* she recalled. *“With my husband’s help, I could carve out small pockets of time for myself.”* Together, they began sharing the household chores. *“He would cook sometimes, watch the baby while I worked, and even take on other tasks around the house,”* she said gratefully. To make things easier, they also hired a caretaker to assist with household chores. *“It wasn’t perfect, but having this support made my life much less stressful,”* Sita reflects. *“I could finally breathe and focus on both my job and my family without feeling completely overwhelmed.”*

Sita laughs softly when she talks about how things have started to change at home. She added, *“Even my in-laws are beginning to understand that my job isn’t just for fun or a personal choice. They’ve slowly realized that supporting me at work actually helps me manage things better at home too.”* She admits the change has been slow, and sometimes it's not perfect, but every little bit of help makes her life easier.

Over time, Sita learned how to take care of herself while still doing her job. *“I started speaking up about deadlines, asking for flexible hours when I needed them, and even asking my coworkers for help if the workload became too much,”* she said. *“I realized that asking for help doesn’t make me weak—it just shows I want to survive and do my best.”*

Sita kept going even when she was not physically healthy or under a lot of stress. She learnt how to ask for help and take time for herself without feeling guilty about it. She realizes that balance is not always perfect and predefined; she works on it every day

with love, patience, and smart choices. She wasn't strong because she did courageous things; she was strong because she made small choices every day to keep going and fulfill her basic needs. It didn't matter how much she did in the end. What was important was that she could be a mother and a professional without losing herself. Sita also made time for herself. These weren't long breaks or big changes; they were short breaks, time to think, or time to relax after work. These little breaks made her feel better and reminded her that she was important too.

As her story explains, many married women start their work with a lot of energy and confidence, but as they take on more responsibilities, it becomes harder for them to maintain that energy and confidence. Sita's employment was more than just a job; it was a place where she learnt about herself, challenged herself, and discovered that finding a balance between work and life is a very personal and continuing process. Her experience illustrates that women often don't find the right balance between work and family. Instead, they have to keep changing it over and over, based on their health, obligations, and the help they get. Sita's ability to balance work and home life did not come naturally; she had to work at it constantly, and her friends and family had to be patient, strong, and understanding. Her path shows that married women are always striving to balance their duties as workers, carers, and people while also keeping their professional and personal lives in balance.

### **Purnima-Strength in Support**

It wasn't easy to be a banker and a mother at the same time. As a banker, Purnima's job was demanding, leaving very little time for personal and family responsibilities. She couldn't get enough time, even when her child needed her the most. She had to work longer hours, meet deadlines, handle stress, and be flexible with her schedule. Being a mother was hard on both her body and mind. She had difficulties sleeping, was often nervous, and had to take care of a baby. Every day, she moved between these two worlds, using her emotional strength and careful planning to get through. This often meant that she had to put her own health and rest on hold. The pressure to do well at work and at home made even the most basic daily duties feel like a fight to keep everything from falling apart.

Purnima added:

*I always felt like my work and home responsibilities were pulling me in different directions. I relied heavily on my parents to handle all these stresses. They helped with the kids, the house, and even just listening to me when I needed to talk made a big difference. My parents were my main source of support throughout this period. They helped me take care of my kids, do household chores, and make things easier for me. They helped me in both practical and emotional ways. I could talk to them honestly, tell them what was bothering me, and I felt like they understood me without judging me. That helped give me the strength to keep on. It didn't solve all the problems, but it did make them easier to deal with and reminded me that I wasn't alone, even when it felt like I couldn't balance work and family.*

Purnima smiles and added:

*I don't know how I would have made it without their help. My husband also helped me to deal with my motions. "He always asked me how I was doing, how I was managing, and sometimes just hearing 'I'm proud of you' made the hardest days bearable.*

Because of this support, Purnima was able to continue working and try her best to manage her job and personal life. Her husband was in another country, but he was there emotionally by listening to her worries over the phone, cheering her on, and telling her she was doing enough. Purnima added, “*I depended on my parents a lot when I was at home. They took care of my child, made meals, and did tasks around the house so that I could focus on my work*”. She reflected:

*I couldn't change the office rules or my work schedule, but I could control how I managed my own responsibilities. Asking for help or for adjustments didn't mean I was weak; it meant I was surviving and trying my best. I learned that I had to speak up for my peace and day-to-day management. If I needed a day off from the office to handle urgent household tasks, I learned to ask for it. I started negotiating the deadlines whenever I could. I realized that staying will only add stress to my day-to-day life.*

Purnima credits her husband and parents for helping her maintain this balance. She added, *“My husband always checked in on me, asking if I was okay, and my parents helped with the house and the kids. With their support, I could focus on my work and my child without feeling completely overwhelmed.”*

She laughs lightly as she continued,

*I know life will never be perfectly balanced. But with careful planning, small adjustments, and emotional support, I’ve learned that I can keep going, grow in my career, and raise my child at the same time. It’s not easy, but it’s possible.*

Purnima thinks back on her experiences with a soft smile and said, *“I quickly realized that I couldn’t do everything perfectly. Life, my career, and my duties at home wouldn’t let me do it. Knowing when to ask for help and how to take care of yourself makes you strong”*. She stops for a moment to reflect on how hard it was to balance career and family at the beginning. She added:

*I felt absolutely tired some mornings when I was trying to meet deadlines and do housework at the same time. But I learnt to take things one step at a time and break them down into smaller pieces. My parents helped me take care of the house, and my child, and my husband, was always there to listen, so this helped me step in when I needed a break. I couldn’t have done it without them.*

Purnima went on,

*I had to speak up at work, too. With help from my family and proper planning, I could fulfill my role as a mother and give my best in my working areas. It taught me that things can be difficult, but you must deal with integrity and confidence without losing yourself; you can find a way to keep going if you stay strong and strategically handle your problems.*

Purnima still hasn't found a final point of balance. She is still learning by doing things and making every little change to her daily life to make it easy to balance both work and home. She is still figuring out what works best for her, and her journey is continuing. This is because of her job and her duty as a mother.

### **Sangita-Rebuilding through Work**

Sangita’s words make it clear that work entered her life not as a choice or ambition, but as a condition for survival. Sangita said, *“I started working as I had to work*

*hard to stay alive, for my kids and for myself.” She stops and starts off into space as she recalls those early days, “I didn’t gain these talents by reading a book or listening to someone telling me what to do. Life taught me because it had to. There was a new difficulty every day.” She further added:*

*Many nights, I cried quietly, wondering how I could handle it all. But I continued going because I had no other alternative. I had to be strong for them. I had to let them know that I would always keep them safe. “Sometimes a neighbor would help, or a friend would check in.*

She further added:

*Over the years of struggle, I learned how to deal with fear, responsibility, and hardship. It was hard, but it made me stronger. I learned that you don’t have to be perfect to be a good mother. It means being there for your kids and giving them strength, which also means a lot.*

After leaving an abusive relationship, Sangita recalled:

*Those first months felt like walking through a rainstorm without an umbrella. I was scared all the time, exhausted, and worried about my children every single minute.” She explains how the weight of responsibility fell entirely on her: I had three kids depending on me, and no one to share it with.*

She is showing a reality that many women are facing, especially those who are victims of domestic violence: they work for necessity, not opportunity. Her hesitation and distant stare make it seem like those early days are hard to remember. Every day, you face a new difficulty with no remedy. She learnt by repetition, failure, and endurance since life itself was her instructor.

She reflects on the support she received: a neighbor who first opened a door for her. Without asking too many questions, they offered her a place to stay. It was not a permanent solution, but it was shelter, safety, and relief. That small room gave Sangita space to breathe again. She said that in those early days, having a roof over their heads mattered more than anything else. Another moment stood out to her: a woman who was yearning for someone to care for her. The talk was short and casual, but it meant a lot. For Sangita, it felt like a delicate opening—a clue that work, and with it a route ahead, may be feasible. That meeting didn’t fix her problems right away, but it gave her hope

when she had little. She took that chance to keep working in that field where she felt safe and secure.

Sangita added, *“It’s strange how strangers can feel like angels when life is at its lowest. Their kindness reminded me that I wasn’t entirely alone, and that gave me the strength to keep going.”*

She also added:

*I understood that surviving didn’t mean I had to do everything on my own. It meant knowing when to reach out, when to let someone else carry part of the weight, and trusting that I could still protect my children while taking care of myself, too.*

She said that these experiences taught her to be strong and confident in any difficult situation. Therefore, looking back, Sangita feels that this early support played a key role in her learning to balance work and life. The shelter supported by her neighbor not only gave her a place to stay but also stability and hope at a time when everything was uncertain. Having a safe space for her children allowed her to focus on her work. The brief meeting with the woman seeking a caretaker was another turning point. Although the conversation was short, it opened the door to work that felt safe and manageable. That gave Sangita an opportunity to earn while still being present for her children, helping her slowly rebuild her daily schedule. These moments taught her that balancing work and family did not come from formal systems or policies only, but from small, timely acts of support that made it possible for her to move forward one step at a time.

On top of that, her children gave her strength. Every time Sangita wanted to give up and became weak, she thought about her and her children’s future. That thought made her get out of bed every day and go out for work, even when she was tired, in pain, or under stress. She worked for money, but it also helped her to fight for her living and be confident enough to face day-to-day challenges. No matter how hard her job was, being able to work and earn her living gave her a purpose and direction in her life. It reminded her that she can take care of herself, protect herself, and be strong and confident on her own.

Sangita learnt how to handle the difficult times without losing her cool. She didn’t have time to think about how much pain she was in since her kids needed her. Sangita

added, *“I didn't think about what I have lost; instead, I think about what still needs to be done”*. Making meals, sending kids to school, and doing everyday tasks were small ways for her to fight back against the life that had tried to beat her. These rituals helped her deal with the things that were going on around her that she didn't know about and gave her a sense of stability.

Sangita's story isn't about easy or simple choices. She said, *“I didn't leave because I was brave. I left because I had to—for my children, for their safety, for our survival”*. Every decision she made felt risky and painful. Working in difficult conditions, moving to a new city, starting from zero, none of it was about me feeling strong. I just did what had to be done, she recalls. At the time, courage wasn't a word she would use for herself; it was about survival, one day at a time.

Slowly, she began to rebuild her life through work. *“Even earning a little money gave me a sense of control I hadn't felt in years,”* she further added. Each day she went to her job, no matter how hard it was, she felt proud of herself.

She added:

*After years of being beaten down, of feeling invisible, work reminded me that I was still a person, that I still mattered. The work wasn't just about earning; it was about reclaiming herself. I learned that surviving and healing can happen at the same time. Every small paycheck, every task I completed, helped me stitch the pieces of my life back together.*

Today, Sangita's story reveals how many women are brave even when they are going through violence and pain. She didn't deal with it in a loud or dramatic way. It was consistent, and she fought on despite ongoing difficulties only for the sake of her children. Sangita balanced her life by being strong, asking for support, and staying motivated to keep working.

Sangita's story isn't about getting everything right or finding the proper answer. She never discovered the ideal method to bring her two worlds together. Every day, she must struggle for peace and always worry about her children's basic needs and safety. She needs to figure out how to meet the needs of her job, her family, and herself. But it's also a story about power. She lived two complete lives at once and learned how to stay

alive in the space between them. She understood that being strong doesn't mean doing everything perfectly, but it means not letting yourself down or breaking apart.

### **Kalpana-Balancing through Support**

Kalpana has never been able to easily combine her work and family life, but she has developed different ways to handle all her duties throughout the years. She worked at a government office and took care of two kids at the same time, so her days were long and hard. She said, *"There were days when I was tired even before the day was over," but "I had to keep everything going at home and at work."* Even under a lot of stress, she always found a way to keep things going. Her husband was the most important person in her life. He backed her work, told her to keep learning, and was there for her when things got too much. Kalpana added, *"He would always remind me that I was strong enough when I thought I couldn't take it anymore."* He kept telling her she could handle both home and work, which gave her the confidence to take care of her family while still pursuing her career goals.

Kalpana recalls how important her husband was during the start of her career. In those early years, when she was still figuring out how to reconcile work and family life, his support gave her confidence and peace of mind. He advised her to keep going, even when she thought she couldn't do it or when she started to doubt herself. His presence made the transition to professional life less terrifying by helping with childcare, modifying his own schedule, or just being there to listen when she was fatigued. Even though her husband was not much used to helping in the kitchen or with cooking, Kalpana believes that help beyond cooking was significant in helping her figure out what she wanted to achieve in her life. Knowing that someone at home believed in her abilities helped her stay focused on her work and take risks she might not have taken otherwise. It was still hard to balance work and family, but her husband's help made things easier during a crucial time in her career. Kalpana remembers those early years as a time when she worked hard, and everyone else helped her out. Kalpana added;

*My husband used to take the kids to school and help them complete their homework. I could do my job better without feeling guilty, knowing he was taking care of my children at home. His help made sure the children were in safe hands.*

Kalpana smiles and said, *"I don't know how I would have made it through those first few months without him"*.

Kalpana hired a caretaker to help her take care of her kids every day. She realized she couldn't do everything on her own because her workload was high. Keeping a caretaker was a practical and needful decision rather than a luxury. Kalpana's babysitter helped her take care of her kids every day by feeding them, keeping them safe, and keeping them in check while she was at work. This aid made her less nervous throughout the day and helped her perform her job better. She still had fears, but having a babysitter gave her kids a sense of routine and stability. It also helped Kalpana feel less stressed, physically and mentally, every day. She was able to better manage her time and keep progressing in her job by dividing her caregiving chores. This option shows that working women often need hired care to balance their work and family lives.

She said, *"The babysitter saved my life. I knew the kids were safe and well cared for when I had to stay late at work, study for tests to get a promotion, or go to long meetings"*. With this strategy, she could work and yet be there for her family. She further added, *"My husband supports, and the caretaker helped me get better at my job while still being there for my kids. I can relax and give myself some time and wisely schedule my time"*.

Kalpana's experience shows that it is difficult for women to handle both work and family on their own. Kalpana said, *"If I didn't have support, I don't think I could have continued working. I got help at home and made good use of the flexibility that came with her government work"*.

On the other hand, working in a government position gave Kalpana certain privileges that were not always available in private-sector jobs. She could manage time off in advance when needed, be present at important household events or her children's school events, and take care of personal or family matters without fear of missing deadlines or encountering work-related difficulties. Kalpana reflects that these facilities did more than save time—they reduced stress, gave her a sense of control, and made balancing work and family far more manageable. Kalpana added, *"My job allows me to plan my leave, which became one of the big relief and mitigation strategies, and spend more time with my kids and family."* She used her annual leave well, conserving it for

times when she had more family commitments. *"I never took time off at random. I planned it around when my kids were on school breaks or when things were busy at home,"* she added. During those times, she was able to focus completely on her kids and the needs of her home without the stress of job deadlines.

Kalpana said that preparing ahead of time helped her stay calm even when she was busy at work. *"I didn't feel guilty or distracted at work because I knew I had time set aside for my family,"* she said. *"I felt better because I knew I hadn't forgotten my kids."* She was able to get her energy and confidence back by taking breaks to rest, spending time with her kids, or focusing on herself.

Kalpana said:

*You can't just work hard to find a balance between job and life. To do well, you need to make sound decisions, follow work rules that may change, and often seek advice from family members. I couldn't maintain this balance if my job didn't allow me to be flexible or if my family didn't help me.*

As her kids grew, they began helping her with household chores. They supported cleaning, preparing meals, and keeping an eye on what needed to be done around the house. Kalpana smiled and said, *"Now they are aware that sharing household responsibilities should be shared,"* she said. This shared duty and responsibility made her work easier, allowing her to concentrate more on her office work and have some time for herself. It also brought families closer together by showing everyone how crucial it is to help one another and work together.

Kalpana added:

*I was able to manage everything thanks to my husband's support, his help with the children, hiring a babysitter, using the benefits of my government job, and even a little help from my kids. Even though I was tired, worked long hours, and had so many responsibilities at once, I kept going to school, moved forward in my job, and made sure our home life stayed strong.*

Kalpana's experience of balancing work and family was not easy, but she found ways to make it smoother and more manageable. She depended heavily on her husband's support, who helped with the children and encouraged her when the workload felt overwhelming. Hiring a babysitter gave her the support she needed to leave her children

and focus on work and school without worrying. The policies of her government job have helped balance work-life, such as planning leave whenever required. Even small help from her children, like being understanding and cooperative during chores or schoolwork, became meaningful and supportive in her daily routine.

Despite long hours and engagement in multiple role Kalpana continued her education to advance her career, moved forward at work, and ensured that her home life remained stable and balanced. Over time, she learns to manage and prioritize her time. Her story states that balancing is not about being or doing everything perfectly, but about stability, being strong enough to make use of available support, and adapting, adjusting, and dealing with challenges as they come up. By combining family support, organizational support, flexibility, and her own hard work and determination, Kalpana was able to grow professionally, continue to care for her family, and keep building her career, even when the demands of life were overwhelming. Kalpana, at 54 and the eldest among the participants, represents a more mature stage in the work–life balance journey, where balance seems to be more stable than comparing to other participants. Unlike other participants whose children are small may still be fulfilling the dual pressures of intensive childcare and career establishment, Kalpana’s experience reflects long-term adaptation and a greater sense of stability. However, this stability is not an immediate and easy outcome; rather, it is the result of years of negotiation within the family, the gradual development of support systems, and experience learning over time.

### **Interpretation**

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana show that married women faced challenges, but the coping mechanisms varied among them (Sah et al., 2024). Sita gets support from her husband, arranges flexible office hours, and takes small breaks for herself. Purnima balanced her work, childcare, and household work with emotional and moral support from her husband, who was often away for work, and her parents, who took care of her child, and by speaking up at the workplace when she needed time off. Sangita completely relied on her own inner strength and ability, her children, and help from neighbors to get through the difficult times, and work gave her the confidence to move forward. It became easier for Kalpana to manage her work, her home, and study with the support of her husband, children, babysitter, and flexible office policies. These

stories explain that support from family and work, asking for help, planning, setting priorities, and adjusting routines could be coping strategies for women. Their experiences show that being strong is not just about facing and getting through difficult times, but also about finding ways and measures to balance work, family, and personal growth while caring for the family.

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana explain how married working women face different levels of difficulty and challenge and find ways to balance work and family life. They came up with different strategies to plan their time, duties, and responsibilities, and to avoid overlapping their work and home lives. Their stories show how women continually try to create these boundaries to maintain balance, even when job and family pressures are very high. This supports Clark's boundary theory, which concerns controlling the space between work and personal life (Ann, 2018).

### **Flexibility and Shared Support in Work–Family Balance**

Here, Sita depends on spousal support, flexible working hours, and personal breaks to keep work and home manageable and balanced (Yucel & Fan, 2023). Clark's theory fits here because Sita strengthened the "border-keepers" in her life by negotiating for flexible work hours and handling her in-laws' strict expectations without completely affecting her life. Border theory (Clark, 2000) frames work-family negotiation as managing domain boundaries via personal strategies and support from "border-keepers" like family, colleagues, and supervisors. Sita tried to manage childcare during fieldwork by depending on the flexibility of both at work and at home. At work, a supportive environment including a flexible office culture, an understanding supervisor, and helpful colleagues' makes it easier for her to adjust when needed. At home, her husband stays involved through regular check-ins, household responsibilities are shared, and support from in-laws and a caretaker helps ease the load. With this kind of support from both sides, she is able to handle work and family together more smoothly, which also helps reduce stress. This allowed her to keep growing personally and professionally without fully giving up her own needs. From a Border Theory perspective, Sita did not remove the boundary between work and family; instead, she made it stronger to make her daily work more manageable. This boundary management reduced immediate role conflict but required continuous effort and negotiation, ensuring that balance was maintained

throughout ongoing activities. As a result, Sita was able to sustain personal and professional growth without completely sacrificing her own needs, though this balance depended on continued support from both family and workplace actors.

### **Family Filling the Gap**

In Purnima's case, she was alone during her pregnancy because her husband worked far away. Purnima balanced household responsibilities, childcare, and her job with her husband's emotional support, parental help throughout, and being vocal in the workplace to request a day off or leave as needed. These supports acted as boundary amplifiers, temporarily expanding the home's domain while still allowing the ability and space to return to work and easing the pressure of being a single mother (Peng et al., 2022). Purnima's family helped her manage stress, but her job requirements remained challenging because there was no formal flexibility in the workplace. Because of this, she had to keep asking for a flexible working environment and setting limits at work. This shows that women mostly relied on informal support networks to cope with role conflict and day-to-day challenges. This strengthened the idea that work-life balance is achieved through ongoing negotiation rather than through structural or institutional assistance. Purnima completely depends on her family for support at home, while also trying to find ways to adjust her work demands by speaking up and negotiating whenever needed. By managing her responsibilities at both work and home, she is able to lower stress and maintain a balance between her job and personal life.

### **Self-Managed Work and Family**

After she left her husband, Sangita was fully dependent on her own confidence and strength, the support of her children, and the kindness of her neighbors. While everything else was not going well, work helped her to make her life easy. Her story reveals how she made her own rules to keep her family safe from past trauma. She did this without any help from others and used her profession to stay alive and find herself again (Jenzer et al., 2020). Sangita's experience explains how women in difficult situations are forced to create self-regulated boundaries between work and family. Her work offers no flexibility or security; she keeps working to protect her children and sustain their lives. This form of coping highlights Sangita's ability to balance roles and was shaped by economic necessity rather than choice. Rather than representing

empowerment alone, her story exposes how work becomes a coping mechanism in contexts where social and institutional protections are absent. Her experience highlights a limitation of Work–Family Border Theory: in situations of high vulnerability, personal negotiation and flexible borders are usually not sufficient, factors such as self-courage and confidants become essential for managing both survival and responsibility.

### **Handling Work and Family with Support**

Kalpana juggled job, home, and studies with the support of her husband, a babysitter, her kids' cooperation, and government policies, weaving the net of external borders. It can be considered as integrated border management: outsourced childcare as a huge support, spousal input blurring lines effectively, routines adjusted to let personal growth flow without being exhausted (Clark, 2000). Outsourced childcare provided relief, while her husband's active involvement helped with the child's care. Her case explains how access to institutional support and shared caregiving helps women to pursue professional growth without stress and exhaustion, highlighting the role of supportive structures in transforming coping challenges to sustainable balance. Her government job provides structured and predictable work borders, including planned leave and flexibility, which help her manage professional demands without excessive hampering family life. At home, she relies on a support system. Her husband actively participates in childcare and school activities, a caretaker helps with daily needs, and her children contribute through household chores. This combination of reliable work structures and active family support allows Kalpana to maintain clear segmentation between her roles, minimizing conflict between work and home.

Across these women's stories, the strategies they used depended on family and support, making use of workplace policies and flexibility, asking for workplace flexibility, setting priorities, adjusting daily routines, and taking time for self-care, which reflects Clark's idea of dynamic border management. They didn't try to remove the boundaries between work and family; rather, they learned and adjusted to manage in ways that allowed them to breathe in both responsibilities. Their strength did not come from handling every challenge and difficulty alone, but from the careful, strategic management of work and family responsibilities (Gerald et al., 2025). This approach helped them to face and solve challenges, grow personally and professionally, and take

care of their families, even in the context of Nepal's socially and culturally gendered expectations. Therefore, these findings suggest that women's coping mechanisms are not solely personal strategies but adaptive responses to unequal boundary conditions. While planning, prioritizing, asking for support, and making routine adjustments, women balance daily work; these strategies primarily help to achieve long-term balance. Women's strength does not lie only in managing everything alone, but also in their ongoing negotiation of boundaries within family norms and culture, and within limited institutional support. This shows the need for stronger workplace policies and shared domestic responsibilities, particularly in Nepal's sociocultural context, where expectations of women's caregiving roles remain strong.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the stories of the four participants about how they cope with day-to-day challenges and the strategies they use to manage their daily routine. The narrative showed that their family support, workplace flexibility, and self-confidence, along with asking for help, were the major strategies they relied on. The findings show that coping strategies vary according to women's family support, workplace flexibility, and economic background. Some women relied on supportive spouses and flexible job arrangements, while others relied mostly on self-confidence and informal support networks. The chapter underscores that managing daily routines is influenced by individual effort, family dynamics, and institutional settings, highlighting work-life balance as a relational and negotiated process.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study explored the work-life balance of working married women in Kathmandu. This section provides the discussion and conclusion drawn from the study, based on the literature, stories of participation, and the researcher's reflections.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The study shows that married women need more than just their own efforts to find a balance between work and home life. They also need a supportive family, flexible workplace rules, and fair distribution of responsibilities.

To reduce role conflict and make boundary management long-lasting and sustainable, the workplace should offer flexible working hours, parental leave, and support for childcare. Families and communities also play a very important role by helping with household chores and responsibilities and giving emotional support. Policymakers should work on bridging the gap between formal rights and everyday practice. They need to ensure that gender-sensitive policies and rules are not just written down but also accepted, utilized, and followed in day-to-day work. These steps can help women balance their many tasks while also encouraging their own growth, job advancement, and family health.

#### **Discussion**

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana show how difficult it is for married women to balance both work and life. It's hard for them to manage their job and their family lives, and Clark's Border Theory helps us understand what they have gone through. The idea suggests that work and family are two distinct areas with flexible or rigid boundaries, and that people follow and manage these boundaries to balance their lives smoothly.

Sita and Kalpana show how to deal with limitations and adjust accordingly, depending on the circumstances and environment. They managed to balance their work-life by relying on family members and caretakers and adopting flexible working hours. Their stories show that women can handle work and family responsibilities in a way that

feels possible and lasts if they get help and make a proper plan (Clark, 2000). Sita's story shows a phase in her life when there was very little separation between work and family, especially while she was living with her in-laws. Her responsibilities as a daughter-in-law continued even after office hours, leaving her with very little time to rest or think about herself. During this period, family expectations were stronger than work demands, and her in-laws played a major role in deciding what was expected of her. Gradually, the situation began to improve. Her husband became her support system; these changes helped her manage work and family effectively, but maintaining balance remained a challenge. Whereas Kalpana's story shows how she maintained a balance between her work and family responsibilities. She was surrounded by many duties, both at home and at the workplace, but support from her husband, hired childcare, help from her children, and the flexibility of her job enabled her to manage them effectively. By proper planning and using the nighttime, she was able to set clearer boundaries between work and family. Her life experience suggests that maintaining balance becomes easier when you have family support and a favorable home environment to achieve both career and personal goals. Also, the workplace rules and policies, such as annual leave and public holidays, made her life easy.

### **Theoretical Linkage**

Clark's (2000) work–family border theory interprets the lived experiences of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana. The theory said that people move between work and family every day, both physically and mentally, how successfully they handle this relies on how strong or weak the lines are between the two areas and who oversees them. The stories tell that the balance between work and life is not always the same. Your personal life, what your family wants from you, and how things are at work all affect it.

Clark's (2000) work-family border theory explains the experiences of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana. The argument suggests that work and family are separate elements of life, yet their roles overlap daily, both physically and mentally. How well someone can balance work and family duties depends on how flexible the workplace is and how supportive the spouse, family member, or boss is (Bansal, 2024). The stories show that not everyone follows the same mechanism to balance work and life; it depends on a person's family, society, and work environment. When family expectations are high,

work restrictions are stringent, and societal pressures are intense, it can be hard for women to fulfill both work and family duties effectively. But it might be easier for those whose spouses are helpful, job schedules are flexible, and parents help. For example, Sita and Purnima could talk to their families and negotiate at work to meet their demands, while Sangita had no support and had to rely mostly on her own strength. This means that Clark's theory explains how to set limits and boundaries and to determine how well women can balance work and family, taking into account social, cultural, and institutional variables. In general, work-life balance is not something that can be set. It's something that needs to be negotiated continuously and continually changed (McGonagle et al., 2022).

For Sita, adjusting to the environment and her in-laws' expectations became difficult. Things became more challenging when she moved into her in-law's place and had a baby. The boundary between home and work was unclear, leading to stress and conflict. Even during ad hoc work meetings and long field trips, family chores and infant care did not stop. Sita had to leave her small baby for weeks, stuck between tough job rules and family demands. At that point, Sita got help from her husband, flexible work hours, and short breaks for herself. She talked her way into easier schedules and managed her in-law's expectations in Jhapa without letting it ruin everything. This helped to decrease her stress and gave her a space to grow at work and at home. Sita had to deal with what her in-laws expected of her, which aligned with Nepali patriarchal traditions. These indicate that women should do household work even when they have job responsibilities, unlike men.

In Nepal, where most families live together (over 60%), strict family and work pressures trap women in endless exchanges that hurt their health (Rauniyar, 2024). The problems are serious: high boundaries lead to too much on your plate, feeling drained, and burnout, like in Sita's case. Without strong workplace policies and rules, such as parental leave, flexible hours, or shared responsibilities, the challenges and difficulties keep growing, making life harder on all sides.

On the other hand, Purnima's story shows how important it is to have a supportive family in managing. It was challenging for her to manage both work and family, as her job offered little flexibility or time off during her pregnancy or after she had the baby.

But her parents helped by taking care of the child and taking full responsibility for household chores, and her husband was emotionally there for her, even though he lived far away. This support helped her keep her job even though it was very demanding and complicated. Her experience confirms that when jobs don't allow flexibility and proper workplace policies, having a supportive family can make it easier to balance work and family (Subedi & Bhandari, 2024). Her experience supports Clark's idea that workplaces should actively help manage work–family boundaries through flexible hours, gradual returns to work, or lactation rooms rather than expecting women to rely solely on personal strength. Without this kind of institutional support, family support may ease stress for a while, but it does not change the unequal double burden of paid work and household responsibilities that women continue to carry. Many studies show that real balance comes from shared responsibility at home, at work, and in social norms, not from short-term coping strategies that hide deeper gender inequality. The story also explains how important it is to negotiate or to take strong decisions to balance work-life (Subedi & Bhandari, 2024). As Purnima's husband was out of the country for his work, she decided to stay with her parents as her work demands extra hours, which hindered her from fulfilling the role of daughter-in-law at her house. Therefore, she chooses to stay longer at her parents' house. Her parents took care of the child and helped her when her husband was away. She also made sure to tell her office directly when she needed to leave or needed some extra time at home. By negotiating her tasks and making short-term changes, she was able to do many things at once.

Sangita's narrative was different from others. For her, employment wasn't about getting ahead; it was about staying alive and taking care of her kids. In her life, career, and family, there was no clear separation. Her job as a mother was the reason for all she accomplished. She didn't get help from her job or her family, so she had to rely on her own strength, help from her neighbors, and her strong sense of duty to her kids. Her story indicates that when life is full of violence and poverty, staying alive is more crucial than creating a balance between work and family. As an example of border crossing under pressure, Sangita's job was essential for her and her children's survival and independence after she had been a victim of domestic violence from her husband. Her work became the reason to feel safe, strong, and a new start over. People can change and push the limits to

protect themselves and their children, even when things are hard. This story shows that women can be strong and face all the struggles when it comes to caring for their child, feeling solely responsible for their care. Her story shows the limits of theory in difficult conditions. Unlike Sita or Purnima, who had support from family and other sources to manage both work and family, Sangita relied solely on herself. For her, work was not fulfilling but a way to survive and avoid collapse. Being a mother was not just one role for her; it was her main identity. Sangita didn't have a supportive family like other women do, so she felt like she had to protect and provide for her children all by herself. So, her choice to work wasn't because she wanted to advance in her job or feel fulfilled; it was because society taught her that a good mother had to endure hardship for her kids to survive. Gender roles affected both her burden and her strength: she felt like she had to do everything on her own, even without her husband's help, without her family's support, which made her work harder emotionally and physically

This shows that in a difficult situation, survival became the only option. Real resilience cannot depend solely on individual effort; it requires social protection, such as supportive policies, economic security, and institutional support. While Clark's model helps explain work-family boundaries, Sangita's experience suggests it must be expanded to include women who lack such support and remain trapped in ongoing insecurity.

For Kalpana, her success shows where the theory works best. When women have outside support, they can create lasting balance, something personal strength alone cannot achieve, especially in a context like Nepal, where women are expected to carry most domestic work. Unlike Sangita, who had to manage everything alone, or Sita, who set rigid boundaries early on, Kalpana's support system reflects Clark's idea of workable boundaries. These boundaries are not erased but actively supported, allowing women to do well at both work and home. In the case of Kalpana, women are socially expected to handle primary responsibility for domestic labor and caregiving. These highlight the norms that, even when women work full-time, household duties are very rarely redistributed equally between men and women. Kalpana's success, therefore, is not simply a matter of personal strength and capability; it reflects the presence of a supportive environment and arrangements that lower the weight of traditional gender

expectations. Her husband's involvement, external childcare, and negotiated routines helped redistribute responsibilities that would otherwise fall entirely on her shoulders (K.C. et al., 2017). At the same time, her case highlights inequality: such support is still a privilege, not the norm, pointing to the need for policies that make balance possible beyond individual effort

These four stories all back up Clark's core point: how people handle and cope with the divisions between job and family affects how well they balance the two. The stories indicate that working hard isn't the only way to attain balance. It also depends on how much support and freedom the family, corporations, and workplace can give.

All of these stories say that you can't achieve work-life balance at all. Instead, it is an ongoing and continuing process of negotiating and managing the boundaries between work and family. Women set clear boundaries when they ask for help, make plans for their family and themselves, set objectives, adjust their routine, and take care of themselves. This is what gives them strength. They can take care of their family while simultaneously working towards their own career goals and objectives. You can't find balance and happiness by ignoring challenges. Instead, you need to make sure that your job and home life are separate in ways that work for you and satisfy your requirements, goals, and support. Clark's Border Theory helps us comprehend what Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana went through. Their experiences highlight how challenging it is for married women to balance and resolve work and family responsibilities. The premise is that work and family are two independent areas that people actively manage to retain their balance and well-being. These areas have either flexible or rigid limits.

### **Conclusion**

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana teach married women how to juggle their jobs and families, and which major areas they should consider. Their experiences indicate that relying only on your own strength is not enough. To be successful, you need a combination of family support (such as a spouse, parent, or neighbor), flexible employment policies (like changeable hours or leave possibilities), and your own hard work. These services work together to help people develop habits that they can stick to over time. This is what Clark meant by "border keepers," which allows

people to shift between their work and family roles without entirely blurring the lines between them.

### **Importance of Family support**

The stories of Sita, Purnima, Sangita, and Kalpana show that married women who enter the workforce need family support to balance work and family. Women with husbands were emotionally supportive, unlike Sangita, whose husband was the reason for her challenging life. On the other hand, parents or in-laws support in other households and child-caring responsibilities. Emotional, practical, and moral help from spouses, parents, children, or caretakers is crucial for women to handle multiple responsibilities effectively.

In line with Clark's theory, family members—especially husbands, parents, and in-laws play an important role in helping women manage the boundary between work and family. Women who received emotional, practical, and moral support found it easier to handle both responsibilities. In contrast, Sangita's experience shows that when spousal support is missing, work–family stress increases and women are left carrying the unequal 'double shift.' This reflects wider gender research, which shows that household work is still mostly seen as women's responsibility, even when they are employed. This study contributes to existing research by presenting that the type and availability of support directly shape women's coping strategies and boundary management. It also highlights that while Clark's Border Theory explains how women negotiate boundaries, the study extends the framework by emphasizing the centrality of family and social context, particularly in a Nepali cultural setting where extended families and day-to-day expectations strongly influence women's work–life experiences. These findings suggest that policies and workplace interventions alone are insufficient effective work–life balance for married women requires coordinated support across family, community, and institutional levels.

### **Importance of Flexibility at Work**

Flexible working hours, understanding managers and supervisors, leave arrangements, and supportive work environments made it possible and easier for women to take care of their families without compromising their job responsibilities. But difficult rules and a rigid environment at work will make the situation more challenging,

especially if you were sick, pregnant, just became a mother, or had a family emergency. The results reveal that companies can benefit from working married women by creating inclusive rules and a safe, flexible workplace that helps women balance work and life, thereby directly impacting their efficiency. The company can also benefit as the worker will be more efficient and motivated to produce quality work in the office.

Clark's theory works well but falls short in tough, unequal situations. It explains balancing work and family boundaries, yet these stories show that real success also needs policies, security, and shared home chores. Without workplace and culture shifts, women just survive—not thrive. The study contributes to the literature by highlighting that work–life balance is relational, context-dependent, and shaped by both organizational and family systems, highlighting the need for policies and cultural changes that enable women to achieve their goals.

### **Life After Having a Child**

All four stories show that having kids has a significant impact on a woman's life. The stories tell that life before and after kids is very different. Life after kids becomes more responsible, with a need to allocate time for childcare, and limited time, which usually makes it harder to balance work and family. To take care of the kids, women had to plan and adjust their work schedules and priorities, and even their career choices. Experiences reveal that being a mother often makes the stress between work and family difficult, especially when support systems aren't strong, or expectations don't change.

In all cases, becoming a mother was a major turning point that made balancing work and family more difficult. After childbirth, women had to rethink how they used their time and energy, while workplace expectations and gender norms largely stayed the same. Using Clark's theory, this period can be seen as one in which family responsibilities easily spill over into work life. Without strong support from family and the workplace, women must face stress, and their career growth is hindered. Therefore, the study reveals that having a baby affects the balance between work and family life of working women. It also indicates that how you deal with things and set limits isn't only your choice; they also depend on the support you receive from family, the office, and society. It also builds on Clark's idea by showing how hard it is to set boundaries when

support isn't fair. It indicates that families, companies, and government systems all need to work together to keep a balance that lasts.

### **Learning by Doing**

The women lack clear plans for managing work and family in the initial period. Instead of learning by reading or listening, they learned by doing things and making mistakes. Over time, they learned to handle things on their own, such as taking support from family members, asking for help, changing and adjusting their plans, setting limits, or finding small amounts of time for themselves. Work makes you stronger, more independent, and more confident, and gives you a sense of purpose, even when things seem difficult. Learning this way shows that work-life balance doesn't happen at all at once; it comes overtime as we grow and learn new things. Not every woman can find balance in the same way. It depends on her age, family situation, job needs, and personal goals. Through experience, trial and error, and openness to change, you learn to handle problems and find balance.

These women didn't follow any principles or a ready-made plan for work-family balance. They learned a bit by doing it. This fits Clark's view that boundaries flex, not stay rigid. Over time, they got better at asking for help, setting limits, tweaking routines, and shifting priorities. But success varied not everyone had an equal shot, since age, job type, family aid, and resources set real limits. Balance takes both effort and the right setup. Therefore, the study demonstrates that work-life balance varies across individuals depending on age, family background, and job expectations. The study underscores that attaining work-life balance needs both personal desire and a supportive environment, emphasizing the need for families, workplaces, and governments to help in balancing the work-life of married women rather than being an obstacle to their career and personal growth

In conclusion rules, culture, and expectations create tension between work and home by making the boundaries either strict or flexible.

Sita, Kalpana, Sangita, and Purnima move between these boundaries every day, facing challenges when work and family demands clash. Their families and workplaces act as gatekeepers, setting limits on how much they can switch between roles. Because of this, they constantly adjust and find ways to balance both work and home responsibilities.

In Nepal's patriarchal context, family responsibilities are often seen as more important than work. Women are expected to take care of the home and family, even when they have full-time jobs. Because of this, they often face difficult choices when work demands clash with family needs. This creates a situation where the boundary is both strict and flexible at the same time. Women are expected to prioritize family, but they still must manage their work duties. As a result, they constantly adjust their time and roles to handle both sides. These challenges are not just personal they are shaped by social norms and expectations around gender and family.

The following table summarizes the essential rules, workplace culture, and expectations

**Table 1**

*Rules, Culture, and Expectations*

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Rules</b>	<b>Culture/Expectations</b>	<b>Tension/Dilemma</b>	<b>Key Border-Keepers</b>
<b>Work</b>	Fixed hours, deadlines, fieldwork (Sita/Purnima)	Commitment questioned for mothers; promotions need extra effort and time	Family pulls vs. career slowdown	Bosses and colleagues being cooperative and patient for Sita
<b>Family</b>	Unwritten: women primary caregivers	Patriarchal: in-laws demand chores/childcare first (all cases)	Work guilt vs. maternal duty	Husbands (supportive for Sita/Kalpana and Purnima), parents and in laws (for Purnima)
<b>Border</b>	Flexible	Support allows balance;	Daily overload:	Caretakers

<b>Crossing</b>	work (flexible office) vs. rigid family	lack of it causes overlap between work and home.	childcare during deadlines	(Kalpana), neighbors (Sangita)
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## **Implication and Reflections**

### **For Organizations**

The study shows that companies should adopt laws that take gender into account, offer flexible work hours, and have friendly leaders. To help married women better manage their careers and family responsibilities, companies should offer flexible hours, remote work options, and support for childcare. This will reduce stress and role conflict.

### **For Families**

A family plays an important role in balancing women's roles effectively. Encouraging husbands and family members to help with household chores and provide emotional support can help women manage stress, balance their family and work goals, and advance their careers.

### **For Policymakers**

The mismatch between formal policies and what really happens at work makes it difficult for women to balance work and family. Policymakers should ensure that society accepts, follows, and enforces workplace laws to support married working women. Additionally, a local childcare framework needs to be developed, as childcare remains one of the biggest responsibilities for working women, and structured support in this area can significantly reduce the conflict between work and family roles. A local childcare framework incorporating the following elements can help working women manage their dual responsibilities and reduce work-family conflict.

The things that can be considered are accessible childcare services near homes and workplaces with flexible hours. Another one is flexible work policies as per job type and requirement (e.g., remote work, flexible hours, part-time options). Also shared family responsibilities are very essential to reduce the burden on women. Workplace support programs such as on-site childcare, allowances, parental leave can motivate women to efficiently perform her duty and responsibilities. On another hand boundary management

training for women needs to be planned as it helps women negotiate work and home roles. Likewise, community and cultural engagement is needed to connect with local networks and challenge gender norms.

### **For Women Themselves**

Women might benefit from preparing themselves, being stronger and confident, setting boundaries, and asking for help. Being aware of available support and being able to negotiate with family and coworkers can help you better manage the challenging, competing demands.

### **For Society**

Supporting married working women is good for society as a whole since it helps men and women be more equal at home and at work. This leads to more people working, more production, more economic growth, and better societal health.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter includes the insights, discussion, findings, conclusion, and implications of the study. It brings together the narrative of married working women's experience of entering paid work, along with the challenges they face and the strategies they adopt. The chapter also highlights the common challenge that married women face: being from different backgrounds and jobs.

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