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## Gender Inequality in Nepal: Challenges Faced by Educated Working Women in Professional Career

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## **Abstract**

The fantasy of an ideal workplace where there is equality and equity to all irrespective of who, where and how they are, created in me the curiosity and hunger for this inquiry. This study aims to explore gender inequality in workplace in Nepal; specifically, how gendered assumptions affect educated working women in their career opportunities and work/life balance. The study is confined to the urban educated working women in white collared job in the city of Kathmandu, Nepal. The method employed is semi-structured interviews. Through doing gender and intersectionality theory, this study respectively shows how gender shapes women's experiences at work and how it is linked to other aspects like gender, age, marital status, class and organizational practices and constrains their roles and life choices. The findings talk about pervasive and persistent gender differences that remain in career development, earnings and family responsibilities across different sectors and jobs (for example, civil service, teaching and business) in Nepal. The study concludes that women, but especially professional women in Nepal, are so often judged first by being female and second by their accomplishments which indicates there is still a very narrow socially constructed role of women.

**Key words:** Gender inequality, Nepal, Educated working women, Professional career, Doing gender, Glass ceiling, Unequal pay, Intersectionality, Work/life balance

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## **Chapter-One**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the background information of the issues related to my research questions. In this chapter, I have described the concept of gender, gender inequality in Nepal and the status of women in Nepal as the background of the study. The status of the women in Nepal are categorized and explained under the four sub-topics; social status, political, economic and violence against women. I have also explained how the relation between work/life balance and career development of Nepalese working women is. I have, then, continued to present the problem of the study, the research questions and the organization of the study.

#### **1.1. Defining Gender**

The terms, 'gender' and 'sex' are used synonymously by many people, but these terms have the distinct meanings. 'Sex' is used to refer biological and reproductive characteristics whereas 'Gender' is a pattern of behaviors recognized as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. Acker (1992) defines gender as the social dimension of biological sex that refers to patterned, socially produced distinctions between feminine and masculine (in Mählck, 2003). It covers a wide concept of sex and related feelings and behaviours including the physical structure and inequalities generated by that structural differences.

Gender refers not to male and female, but to masculine and feminine i.e. to qualities or characteristics that society attributes to each sex. It refers to the roles and responsibilities, attributes and power relations that are socially constructed by and assigned to men and women of a given society or community. Postmodernists argue that gender is a mere product of human discursive processes and, therefore, not a firm source of identity or inequality (Para-Mallam, 2017). But in social contexts like Nepal, traditional and religious values are dominant in shaping the attitudes and behavior of its 26.4 million people (CBS, 2011). So, the perceptions of gender are deeply rooted very widely in Nepal both within and between the cultures and societies. Thus, it determines power and resources for females and males.

## **1.2. Gender Inequality in Nepal**

In general, gender inequality is defined as unequal treatment and opportunities due to perceived differences based solely on the issue of gender or sex. It commonly means three things. First, men usually experience better opportunities, more freedom and higher social regard than women who share the same social characteristics (such as class, origin, race nationality and age). Second, men usually hold sway in marriages and other direct relationships between women and men. And, third, men occupy a preponderance of the social positions that possess significant political, economic, legal or cultural power (Jacobs, 1995).

It is a severe social barrier for human development worldwide. Gender based discrimination in different forms starts right after the birth and it continues throughout the life cycle. This discrimination has established the hierarchical relationship between men and women in the society and also helped to create many rigid gender norms that restrict women's opportunities and stifle their development in private and public sphere. This unequal treatment and disparities are seen in various spheres such as health, education, political representation and labour markets.

Gender inequalities exist because of both outright discrimination in society and persistent gender stereotypes, difficulties with regulating the private sphere, the segregation of labour market etc. Primarily, gender inequalities start in families and spread through the institutional structures and in most cases, they dominate in the labour market for example, because of the difficulty of balancing work and family life, which continues to be seen as the woman's responsibility in most countries (Örtenblad et.al. 2017). It is a major barrier for the overall development of the country as gender is a determinant for the basis of discrimination in various spheres such as health, education, political representation and labor market.



Nepal is a country of great geographic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. According to Central Bureau of Statistics (2011), there are people from 125 different caste speaking 123 different languages in Nepal. This abundance of diversity, however, also signifies the difference in people's beliefs, values and norms. Dominated by Hindu<sup>1</sup> practice of social traditions, a discriminatory relationship amongst people of such varied backgrounds exists in Nepalese society, which is mostly dominated by caste-based discrimination and gender-based discrimination. Discrimination is recognized as a form of inequality and issue for women not only in Nepal but all around the world. More than half of the population of Nepal consists of women, whose large portion is still discriminated in different phase of life directly or indirectly though there are some differences in each region, society or ethnicity.

According to the UN's Human Development Report, Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite measure to quantify the loss of achievement within a country due to gender inequality. It uses three dimensions to measure opportunity cost: reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation. Nepal ranks 118 with 0.480 value in GII (UNDP, 2017). This statistic shows that girls and young women face numerous challenges in their everyday life, ranging from the ill effects of early marriage to psychological and sexual violence, fewer opportunities in the workspace to superstitions and societal traditions that always seem to place women on a lower rank. According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey (2010/11) Nepal has an adult literacy rate of 56.6%. However, the male and female literacy rates stand at 71.6% and 44.5% respectively, pointing to a huge disparity between the two genders. It is then no surprise that women have less education, information, and opportunities for self-enhancement at home, let alone in the professional world.

On this scenario, this study will explore the gender inequality in Nepal with the focus on challenges experienced by educated working women particularly regarding their career development.

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<sup>1</sup> Main religion of Nepal.

### **1.3. Status of Women in Nepal**

Before I represent the research question of the study, I will briefly introduce the general status of women in Nepal. The total population of Nepal is 26,494,504 in which 51.5 percent are women (CBS, 2011). Though they equal to men in terms of population, their role and participation are placed in background and men are in foreground. Women's representation is severely limited in the formal sector of Nepalese economy (Acharya et.al 2007). They have less power and autonomy than men in making decisions of their own. Across the diversity, most of the communities in Nepal are patriarchal. So, the status of women is determined by the patriarchal social system, values, and women's rights preserved and protected by the state, and state policy for the development of women (ibid). There is huge gap in accessing the rights and power between men and women in Nepalese society.

#### **1.3.1. Social Status of Women**

A discriminatory relationship among the people of various backgrounds exists in Nepalese Society due to the influence of traditional beliefs. It is mostly dominated by caste-based discrimination and gender-based discrimination (CBS, 2011). Women's life is strongly influenced by her father, husband and son. The culture of son preference is still in practice in Nepal in almost all castes and ethnicities. They are responsible of taking care of their parents in old age and performing the last rites and after death rituals of their parents. Therefore, sons are viewed as parents' old age security and given more preferences and opportunities (Acharya, et al. 2007).

Nepalese society creates a distinct role for men and women since its formation. Men are the "breadwinner," "protector", "provider" and held a superior position within the "domestic mode of production" and control the distribution of resources and goods in the family (Subedi, 2010). The Nepalese social system is based on patriarchal Hindu philosophy that empowers men and subordinates women. It is therefore that women are weak and dependent on men and derive their social status (including inheritance right, ritual status and access to property) from their fathers, husbands and son.

With significant progress on gender equality globally, gender imbalance in terms of the number of women employees in the workforce, their participation in higher position and access on the use of power and making decision is still seen in Nepalese context (Kanel, 2017). The employed and self-employed women face several difficulties in their homes and communities, travelling to and from their work, as well as in their workplaces.

### **1.3.2. Violence against women**

In Nepal, the violence against women is still existing. It is defined as ‘any act that results in or is likely to result on, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty whether occurring in public or private life (Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers 2012).

According to a report developed by the WOREC (Women's Rehabilitation Centre, 2016), 34.4% of women who engage in domestic work have to bear domestic violence. The report also said 28% of women in agricultural sector, 14% of women holding blue-collared jobs, 13 percent of female students, 6% of women in business sector, 1% of female teachers, 1% of women working in non-governmental organisations, 0.1% of women in governmental sector, and 0.3% women in social service face some form of violence at their workplace in Nepal (The Himalayan Times, 2017).

Violence against women is occurring due to traditional social norms and practices. As an example, dowry-related violence is prevalent mostly in the terai. However, even countrywide 50 percent of cases of violence every year are dowry related (WOREC, 2016). Similarly, during menstruation time, women are kept out of the house in cowsheds and are denied adequate shelter, food and social contact. They are prevented even from drinking milk or curd, are exposed to excessive cold temperatures and the danger of snake bites. Likewise, women are physically and mentally harassed in workplaces too. Though, government and the other civil society members are doing their best, still there is plenty of room to work and control the forms of violence against women.

### **1.3.3. Women in Politics**

In Nepal, people were greatly influenced by different struggles for freedom. The participation and contribution of women in all movements for the freedom and political changes was very high. Historically, women leaders in Nepal have equally contributed to establish democratic processes however, there is very low participation of women at decision making. There is no doubt that both men and women contributed equally in people's movements since 2006 and protection and promotion of human rights, good governance and sustainable peace. However, men only fulfill the state positions.

It is a significant achievement that the recent Interim Constitution (2007) has ensured 33% women representation in the parliament. On this basis, in the present parliament, women members have come from diverse ethnic cultures, traditions, groups and geographical areas which brought meaningful and remarkable contribution for establishing equal and just society. There has been change in cultural assumptions about women and leadership in Nepal. Women serving as ministers, professors, civil society leaders and other political leaders have demonstrated their competences as leaders to the public. But, because of patriarchal thought, still the higher political positions are not given to the women in political parties and state mechanisms.

According to Shrestha and Hachhethu (2002), many female politicians regardless their party affiliation, viewed that their inclusion in the party committee or the elected bodies was merely symbolic. Despite women occupying 33% of seats in the Constituent Assembly their influence in decision-making level has been seen limited.

### **1.3.4. Women in Labour Market**

The present situation of female workers in labour market is shown by the following table, where employment of women in white collar jobs is much lower than that of men. Men are overwhelmingly involved in economic activities like in paid employment, in the industry and the service sectors, while women are overwhelmingly involved in agriculture and extended economic activities i.e. mostly related to agricultural produce processing (Bhadra and Shah, 2007).

They carry the double burden of work in the family, in the farm and have to work long hours. With more men entering other non-farming sectors agriculture is becoming increasingly 'feminized' (ADB, 1999). Women are participating in business, teaching, civil service, manufacturing, tourism and related sectors too. But, in all these sectors, they are concentrated at lower levels. Their working conditions are poor and trade union activism is also low.

Though, the government offices regulate the same wage pay to men and women, women working as daily wage laborers and in privately-owned institutions get less paid than men in the same position. In daily wage work, even if they do same, women get 250 rupees per day, about 2.50 dollars per day but men get 350 rupees, about 3.50 dollars per day (NLFS, 2017). In many privately-owned institutions, the pay is determined by the management team. It is not publicly transparent and differs from institution to institution.

The situation of Nepalese women is too severe to compare with men. In general, women have poorer command over productive resources such as education, land, technology and financial assets. The insurgency for more than 10 years between the state and the rebel has further widened this gap. After the success of Peoples Movement II in 2006, measures to reforms were implemented for women empowerment. Still, a wide range of inequalities are common in Nepal. The following table shows the labour force participation rate by sex.

**Table 1.1. Labour force participation by sex in Nepal**

Categories	Male (%)	Female (%)
Agriculture	59.71	82.83
Industry	9.88	6.47
Services	30.4	10.69
Wage and salaried workers	33.5	10
Contributing family workers	21.5	61

(Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database 2017. Data retrieved in September 2018).

The table illustrates that inequality in workplaces in Nepal is profoundly linked to the quality of jobs. It shows that women are underrepresented in many of the high income and high prestige sectors like services and industries. Only 6.47% women are involved in industrial works and 10.69% are working in service sector. This is because the high-paid and high-ranking jobs in most workplaces are systematically reserved for males. It states that most workplaces are more likely to hire or promote men. In addition, the jobs are categorized as ‘women’s work’ for example women participate more in agriculture and as family workers. The table shows that, only 10% women are involved in wage and salaried worker whereas men’s involvement is 33.5%. This clarifies that they tend to be in no-paid and/or low paid work (Devey, 1993). In contrast, only 10% women are working in paid sector. They are mostly in urban areas and employed in teaching, tourism as well as in the civil service and mostly in low-level positions.

Gender inequality in labour market in Nepal is not only observed in terms of participation rates of women but also who participate are likely to face the challenges in workplaces than their male counterparts. Therefore, this study will focus on what challenges the educated women face in their workplaces.

#### **1.4. Work/life Balance and Career Development of Nepalese working women**

According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey, the population of working women is 45.7 percent; among them only 10 percent women are in the paid work and rest of them work primarily as unpaid family workers in subsistence agriculture with low technology and primitive farming practice (NLFS, 2017). Increased participation of women in labour force in Nepal is posing number of challenges. Among them, managing work and family responsibilities is one of the most significant challenges women face. Balancing work/life is often more difficult for working women than men in Nepal because of the disproportionate burden of the family responsibilities. There is also a notion that work/family roles are largely shaped by stereotypical gender roles due to the traditionally held belief of men as “bread-winners and women as “house makers”.

Work/life balance is defined as an employee’s perception that multiple domains of personal time, family care, and work are maintained and integrated with a minimum of role conflict (Clark, 2000 in Raya & Delina, 2013). It is a key issue in all types of employment as dual career of women have become common in Nepal due to their growing participation in paid work. They have stepped into workplaces, but the role responsibilities of women still remain the same, i.e. women may be at the higher position, still the “nurturing” or “care giving” roles are considered much a part of feminine roles. This has indeed become a tough challenge for women as they have to perform a lot of duties in home and office as well (ibid). Working women in Nepal can not neglect their household duties due to the traditional cultural perspectives towards women. It results that many of them have shorter life of professional career.

The imbalance between work and family has real consequences in women’s professional career. According to Friedman & Greenhaus (2000) women whose career orientations are dissimilar from those of their husbands experience relatively intense conflict between work and household roles. Similarly, disagreement in family roles, husband’s attitude towards wife’s employment status can contribute to work-family life imbalance.

Numerous studies have identified also workplace factors as source of imbalance in work/life. It is stated that workplace culture has a profound impact on women's work/life balance and career success. For example, higher level of physical and mental involvement with work, stressful communications, physical and mental harassment, lack of support for family responsibilities, gendered bias at both in workplace and family are also hinder to balance work/family life. It significantly affects the quality of family life and career attainment of working women. The consequences for women may include serious constraints on career choices, limited opportunity for career advancement and success in their work-role, and the need to choose between two apparent opposites—an active and satisfying career, or marriage, children, and a happy family life (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

There is a big gender gap in Nepal which makes difficult for career women for balancing family responsibilities and their professional roles. Considering this point, this study attempts to explore the challenges faced by working women in maintaining work/life balance. The various implications on career development of working women due to work/life imbalance have also been examined in this study.

### **1.5. Presenting the Problem**

In Nepal, I noticed that the gender inequality is closely connected with patriarchal norms and values. Though women are equally qualified, men are considered more capable than women to perform organizational work and employers therefore, preferring to hire them. Likewise, women working in different workplaces encounter with inequality in treatment and opportunities. This view of gender inequality, I find affecting also the entire organization of labour market, social inclusion and equality in pay, work responsibilities and career development. The existing studies are confined for exploring women's status in the workplaces. These studies correlate widespread causes and consequences of gender inequality in Nepalese society. But, gender inequality between the educated men and women and challenges women encounter in professional career are still not widely explored issues in Nepal. Therefore, in this study, I will explore challenges faced by educated working women in their professional career.



This is also to say, in this study, I want to explore experiences of working women in balancing work/life. Women in Nepal fulfill family responsibilities and also try to remain fully involved in their careers coping up with the competing demands of their multiple roles. The caring responsibilities that working mothers have lays a heavy stress on them when it is combined with their professional duties. The attempt of working women to integrate, organize and balance the various problems and activities in their different roles simultaneously puts them under tremendous pressure to continue on a career path (Raya & Delina, 2013). On this basis, my study concentrates on how the work/life imbalance influences their career progress in the tradition bound society like of ours.

### **1.6. Presenting the Research Questions**

Women in Nepal, as elsewhere, are responsible for three types of work i.e. reproduction, management of the household and employment. However, reproduction and management of the household is not considered as a productive work. Moreover, women in Nepal have much lower opportunities for gainful employment. A woman still requires permission from her husband or parents to go into business or work. Though they are equally qualified as men, their access to institutional, decision-making and development sectors remain marginal, irrespective of ecological regions, urban/rural areas and ethnicity/caste (Acharya, et.al, 2007).

Mainly, the following key question is the main agenda for inquiry in my study:

*-What are the major challenges that educated women face in their professional career?*

The other supporting research questions are listed as follows:

*a. Are they getting equal access to work and wages like men working in the same position and same occupation?*

*b. How do they balance their work and family life? What are the tough challenges they experience on this way?*

Based on current literature, I assume, in this context, that working women in Nepal struggle more throughout their professional career than their gender counterparts. This hypothesis will be verified or refuted at the end of this study. The study will fulfill the requirement of reaching a scientific standard by spotlighting latest trends in the academic discussion regarding the subject matter and by conducting qualitative research with interview to various females of diverse occupational backgrounds and positions in Kathmandu, Nepal who have been carefully selected on the basis of their career paths. With this, the study gives clear picture of current situation in Nepal whether educated working women feel discriminated against or not in Nepalese labour market and if so, in what challenges they encounter with.

### **1.7. Organization of the Study**

In this section, I have briefly introduced the systematic and structure of this thesis, in order to ensure clarity and comprehensibility. I have divided this study into six chapters. In this chapter, I have presented the background of the study, a brief account of gender, gender inequality in Nepalese context and status of women in Nepal. I have also discussed the problem statement and the research questions. The second chapter reviews the literature on gender-based inequality in Nepal with focus on challenges of educated working women in their professional careers. The third chapter deals with the theoretical perspectives that have been chosen to guide for understanding the topic. I have presented doing gender and intersectionality theory as theoretical framework of my study. Likewise, chapter four deals with research methodology and in the fifth chapter, I have presented and analysed the data that I have collected from the interview. In this chapter, I have stated the findings and linked the discussion with the findings. Finally, in chapter six, I have summarized major findings, discussed the issues emerged from the study and concluded the study with my own reflection and understanding.

## **Chapter- Two**

### **Previous Studies on the Matter**

In this chapter, I made the effort to present the brief review of some existing literature and relevant studies concerning educated working women's challenges in professional career and work/life balance. I have discussed about those literatures dividing them into three main sub-categories: international researches, studies on Nepalese context and studies on work/life balance. I have concluded this chapter with my point on why this study is different than relevant others.

#### **2.1. International Researches on Gender Inequality at the Workplace**

Gender inequality in the workplace has attracted lots of attention in the academia. This inequality mainly takes the forms like unequal pay, unequal employment probability, less opportunities for the promotion, sexual harassment etc. (Huo, 2013). Previous researches of western scholars indicate that gender inequality is a social issue which exists in all the workplaces. The concept of women and workplace have become a major area of studies after the publication of Boserup's 'Women's role in economic development' in 1965 A.D. Boserup was a pioneer in raising the gender issues. She analyzed the changes in traditional rural practices as societies modernized and examined the different impact of those changes on the work done by men and women. Her work pointed that modern development had neglected the women and left them behind. Although, this study had discussed on the division of labour by sex, it primarily focused on agriculture production.

In 1998, Davis-Netzley studied on women in corporate positions above the glass ceiling and explored their perceptions on corporate mobility and strategies for success in elite positions in Southern California. Through interviews of 16 men and women corporate presidents and chief executive officers (CEOs), it is found, despite the advances women have made in the professional world, there are still many barriers. Davis- Netzley (1998) describes the 'Glass Ceiling' as the 'invisible barriers through which women can see the elite positions but can not reach them. He further states, still, there are many attitudes and perceptions limiting professional women's access to top positions.

Further on, several studies have argued barriers to be job specific. One such study on public and private sector in Sweden by Wadman (2014) examined potential gender inequality in authority positions in the Swedish labour market. The findings show that women have poorer advancement opportunities compared to men. In contrast, men have significantly higher probabilities of holding managerial positions and this is valid both in public and private sectors of Swedish economy.

Similar results are reported in academic profession too. Another research of Sperandio (2014) studied the status of female teachers in societies focusing on a question of their role and respect in teaching profession. She explored the status of women teachers with specific reference to Uganda and Bangladesh. She found that in those countries, secondary school teaching is perceived as having higher status than primary school leadership which is occupied more by men. As a major finding, she stated women are typically occupying the lower status positions within the teaching profession as the society has impression that they are lacking in skills to higher status positions. She concluded that discriminatory gender practice is a barrier to women to progress in administration and leadership positions in both Uganda and Bangladesh.

Zhao (2017) provided a general picture of how gender equality works today with focus on women's education and labour force participation in China. She stated that China has great internal inequalities in women's participation in labour force and economic income. China has comparatively high rate for women's labour force participation, but women are not positioned equally to men in the labour market. She found that the wage gap between men and women is expanding because of women's unequal position in the labour market both horizontally and vertically. She also found that certain stereotypical and naturalized gendered differences between men and women hinder women to reach at top management positions. She concluded that career path of a female worker is shorter than men because it relies on gendered and traditional Chinese ideology about responsibilities of care within the family.

## 2.2. Studies on gender inequality at the workplace in Nepalese context

It is challenging to categorize previous works written specifically on challenges of educated working women in the workplaces in Nepalese context. They take too simple understanding of gender discrimination regarding all men as one group and all women as the other. I also noticed a tendency of researching this issue with an interdisciplinary approach mainly between economics and sociology (Zhao, 2017). Those studies often focus on the economic growth and compare only the social status between men and women. For example, Gautam's research targets at the status of working women in private banks of Kathmandu valley. She found that most of the working women are from the age of 26 to 30 years. They are married, belong to Brahmin<sup>2</sup> and Newar<sup>3</sup> community. As a major finding, she said, though there is no significant discrimination in salary, most of the working women are not in the higher positions. (Gautam, 2007).

Similarly, Pokharel (2008) studied gender discrimination in Nepal from women's perspectives. The study documents the perception of women in discrimination in various aspects in a male dominated society. She states that women experience discrimination in both societal and household level. Particularly, married women experience more discrimination regarding education, occupation and property. Similarly, unmarried females perceive discrimination in education, freedom to move out of home and way of behaving. She found that those women consider gender and customary practices as major factors responsible for discrimination.

Gender discrimination is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon (Gurung, 2012). In the study, she tried to diagnose the various aspects related to discrimination between male and female, its types and extent and the knowledge about discrimination in Nepalese society. This is a micro level research, conducted among the female students studying in Bachelor level. The finding stated that the cause of gender discrimination has also multiple linkages such as mode of production, availability of resources, biological factors, cultural value system, social system etc. are responsible to generate gender discrimination and low status of women in Nepal.

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<sup>2</sup> It is a main community of Nepal which consist of people from Brahmin caste. Majority of people belong to this community in Nepal.

<sup>3</sup> It is a group of indigenous people living in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal.

Another study of Rai (2015) focused on unequal gender power relation and women's role in decision-making process in politics in Nepal. The socio-cultural and economic status of women in grassroots level are studied to relate the factors that hinder women to voice their opinions, raise questions on their leadership skill and how these women exemplify majority of women in Nepal. She concluded that women's participation in decision-making level is relatively lower than men.

Some studies focused on insecurities that Nepali women experience in the workplace. Women in Nepal encounter multiple challenges to their full participation in the working environment. For example, Coyle, D. et. al (2014) studied on the difficulties employed and self-employed women face in the wider context – in their homes and communities, travelling to and from their work, as well as in their workplaces. This study illustrated the range of insecurities women reported in different spaces and in relation to different actors, the impact their insecurities have on their wellbeing, and the steps that they took to address the challenges they faced. The study stated that the insecurities women experienced posed significant challenges to their security and safety as well as their performance at their jobs.

### **2.3. Studies on balancing work/life and Career Development**

Since my research question is 'what challenges do educated women face in professional career', I found the issue of work-family life in career development closely connected to my study. Many scholars have observed that the work family literature has been dominated by a conflict perspective. Such studies are based on the foundation of Role Scarcity theory (Marks, 1977 in Adhikari, 2018) which assumes that due to fixed amount of time and human energy, individuals who participate in multiple roles (such as work and family) inevitably experience conflict and stress that detract from their quality of life. Therefore, work-family life research studies have continued to emphasize conflict, stress, job and life dissatisfaction, intention to turnover, and impaired well-being (Lingard & Francis, 2006 in Adhikari, 2018).

Nepali (2018) researched on balancing work and family life focusing on the problems and its remedies. This study focused on women workers efforts to maintain balance between their work and family lives in Nepal. He also explored the ways to maintain proper balance between the two sets of their lives. He found that looking after the family and children is generally perceived to be a primary responsibility of women. With this, it is equally important for them to perform better at work. This struggle to balance both sets of life have serious implications on the health and career of the working women.

The role of working women has changed throughout the world due to economic conditions and social demands. This has resulted in a scenario in which working women have tremendous pressure to develop a career as robust as their male counterparts while sustaining active engagement in personal life (Raya & Delina, 2013). They studied about the tough challenges faced by working women in maintaining a balance between their personal and professional life in Pondicherry, India. The various factors affecting the work-life balance of married working women have been examined in this study. Their study was able to measure the work-life balance of working women finding that married working women find it very hard to balance their work and personal life irrespective of the sector they are into, the age group they belong to, the number of children they have and their spouse's profession (ibid). Through this study, it was found that the problems faced by the working women of Pondicherry in terms of work-life balance are quite high which is affecting their quality of life.

O'Carroll (2015) studied the main factors and challenges that Irish women working in the corporate sector experience in relation to their work life balance and whether it is related to their family life outside of work. The overall result of survey showed the women working in the corporate sector face difficulties like meet work expectations, life pressures and responsibilities (childcare and family). She found that imbalance in work life lead to negative effects on the individual and their work and personal lives including mental health illness, work family conflict and satisfaction issues.

With the review of existing studies related on gender inequality at workplace, socio-economic status of women and balancing work-family life for career development, I came to know the major problems of working women like their power imbalance in the society, unequal pay and limited opportunities in labour market. Along with this, there can be also various challenges to women they face in their workplaces because of their gender. The patriarchal social structure, traditional beliefs, conservative nature, superstitions etc. of the Nepalese society which discriminate the women much in regard of education, training, employment etc. These literatures have enhanced my understanding of the problems faced by educated working women in the workspace from various perspectives. In addition, they enriched my knowledge to build concrete base for this study.

Relatively very little research has been done in Nepal on the issues of gender inequality among educated men and women and work/life interface. None of the researches mentioned above took a comprehensive study to explore the difficulties educated working women encounter both in professional career and in work/life balance in Nepal. Hence, this study aims to shed light on this issue.



## **Chapter- Three**

### **Theoretical Considerations**

This chapter attempts to present the theoretical framework for the study of challenges to working women in their professional career in Nepal which will be used throughout the analysis. The concept of doing gender and intersectionality theory have been applied as guidelines of the study. With the application of these theories, my point here is, to show how gender influence on the professional career and work-family life of working women. So, my study looks upon the concept of these contemporary theories of social science i.e. doing gender and intersectionality as theoretical framework.

#### **3.1. Conceptualising Gender as a Doing**

‘Doing Gender’ of West & Zimmerman (1987) has been basically used in this research to discuss on how gender is constructed at the workplace in Nepal. This is now widely used concept for theorizing and researching on gender, work and organizational studies. It is developed by West and Zimmerman in 1987 which challenges the notion long held by classical sociologists that gender is defined by the roles, or behavioural characteristics, instead contend that human beings “do” gender by organising “activities to reflect or express gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In their work, one central point of analysis that West and Zimmerman (1987) put forward is to show how gender is created in the situation rather than existing a priori. They thereby emphasize the importance of interaction for an understanding of gender identity as well as inequality. Doing gender is conceptualized as a routine accomplishment in social interactions. Thus, in order to be categorised as a man or a woman interactional work has to be done.

Some sociologists recognize the gendered social order and the practices and processes of gendering in everyday life. They speak of “doing gender”. As West and Zimmerman (1987) stated ‘A person’s gender is not simply an aspect of who one is, but more fundamentally it is something that one does, recurrently, in interaction with others.’ It is produced and reproduced in everyday social conduct. Furthermore, gender is seen as an important part of societal structures and informing societal hierarchies and power systems (Nentwich & Kalen, 2014). Hence, societal structures and hierarchies as well as inequalities are important to explain how gender identity can be done in a certain interaction.

A second theoretical influence of gender as a doing was derived by Judith Butler in 1990 from her work on performativity. It is summarized as a process through which gendered subjects are constituted by the position of the discourse allowed. The strength of the doing gender paradigm or a theory of gender practices is that it acknowledges the embodied nature of human activity (Butler, 1990). So, Butler defines gender as a human production that is maintained by individuals by constantly 'doing gender'. Throughout their lives, human beings learn what is expected, they do what is expected, they see what is expected and they react in expected ways and thus, altogether they construct and maintain 'gender' order (ibid).

Butler's work on the performativity and materiality of gender developed a post-structuralist notion of gendered subjectivity. With that gender identity became a more fluid and flexible concept, and the analysis of 'doing gender' an analysis of the gendered practices that shows how both stability and instability of how gender identity is 'done' as well as 'undone' (Nentwich & Kalen, 2014). Both perspectives of theorizing gender as a social practice conceptualize gender identity as an ongoing activity or a 'doing' within everyday life. However, West and Zimmerman analyses fine grained naturally occurring interactions and Butler's conception of 'doing gender' focuses more on how gender is performed to real and imagined audiences (ibid).

In my study, I focused specifically on the employment experiences of women in the workplaces. Workplace interactions are important for two main reasons. First, as generations of feminist scholars have argued, the workplace is a crucial site for the reproduction of gender inequality. If, as doing gender theory posits, hegemonic gender norms maintain male dominance, then the workplace is an important place to investigate challenges to normative gender performance. Second, educated women in Nepal have started to participate actively in the paid works in many workplaces. Thus, doing gender is mainly applied as a theory to analyse how doing gender is linked to gendered structures, gendered hierarchies and the gendered identities in the workplaces. This is also used to explore how gender creates inequality between men and women at the workplaces.

West & Zimmerman (1987) contend that the "doing" of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures." With this notion, in my thesis, doing gender is used to explore how gender is practised in workplaces focusing on many issues such as division of work and work responsibilities, pay gap, allocation of household works etc. I have also focused on how similar jobs get gendered differently through the way in which gender is done at work (Hall, 1993; Leidner, 1991). The use of 'doing gender', in this study, tends to focus on how gender differentiation, hierarchy and asymmetry are maintained in the workplaces in Nepal. In this sense, the focus has generally been on how doing gender leads to doing differences in the realm of work.

### **3.2. Intersectionality Theory**

This theory is used to explain how the various interactions of gender, age, marital status and class background that constitute inequality in the workplace. The term intersectionality specifically derived from the work of critical legal scholar, Kimberley Crenshaw (1989). She used the concept of intersectionality to grasp the ways in which the interactions of gender and race limit black women's access to the American labour market and how a lack of understanding of this intersection led to the marginalization of black women and black women's experiences (Walby et. al, 2012). While the theory began as an exploration of the oppression of women of color within society, today, the analysis is potentially applied to catch the relationship between socio-cultural categories and identities.

Intersectionality has become the commonly adopted term to capture thinking around interfaces, multiple oppressions, and mutual constitutions that can be located in legal, political, and sociological academic scholarship; and, in particular, the critical feminist streams of these disciplines. It is thus an idea often used in critical theories, the ways in which oppressive institutions (caste, class, religion, ethnicity and gender) are inter-connected and cannot be examined separately from one another that power and oppression rest upon.

In addition, the intersectionality concept is specifically used to address the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society, where it claims that gender as the primary factor determining a woman's fate. It is therefore the concept can be a useful analytical tool in tracing how certain people seem to get positioned as not only different but also troublesome and, in some instances, marginalized. Intersectional thinking has gained increasing prominence in work and organizational studies, primarily utilized as a specific framework for analyzing positions and experiences within the "gendered and ethnicized occupational hierarchy" (Bradley & Healy, 2008).

Crenshaw (1991) states three types of intersectionality in her article, firstly the structural intersectionality concerns the intersections of unequal social groups. Secondly, the political intersectionality, in which she analyzes how both feminist and antiracist politics have often helped to marginalize the issue of violence against women. Then, thirdly, she presents the representational intersectionality discussing the cultural construction of women of color.

McCall (2005) reviews the concept of intersectionality and identifies three distinct approaches: intra-categorical, anti-categorical, and inter-categorical. The intra-categorical is concerned to 'focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection' 'in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups'. Anti-categorical complexity is integrated to feminist post-structuralism and deconstruction, which rejects or destabilizes race, class, sexuality and gender. It also states that inequalities are rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class and gender. The inter-categorical approach 'provisionally adopt[s] existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality among multiple and conflicting dimensions' (in Walby et. al 2012). She analysed the inequalities within the categories, not only between them which catches the complexities implied in intersectionality.

Collins (1990) argued that ‘intersectional analyses, as knowledge generated from and about oppressed groups, unveil [...structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal dimensions] of power and reveal how inequality is constructed and maintained through multiple aspects of identity (ibid). On this ground, this study applies the theory of intersectionality to understand how multiple identities (gender, age, marital status and class background) can intersect and interact at work. Intersectionality, in this study, also speaks out to issues to women such as unequal family responsibilities, obstacles to achieving higher positions or excelling in certain fields, and lack of family-friendly environment at many of the workplace settings, therefore, the application of this idea has been valuable in my study.

Gender intersects with other social identities such as class, race, age, family background, religion. Referred to intersectionality, multiple axes of differentiation are understood to construct gender experiences in varied way (Davis, 2008). I have conceptualized the intersectionality in reference to the following components; division of work, wage setting, harassment and work/life balance while doing the work. These components of inequality combine within many workplaces in Nepal to uphold masculine values that emphasize higher position, pay, recognition of the work and career development than the feminine.

In this sense, intersectionality, in this study, is used as a way of framing the how the educated working women are oppressed in their professional career. The study closely relates to the concept of intersection and the fact that gender is going to be discussed in the context of socio-cultural and economic aspects. I have used the concept of intersectionality which demonstrates how gender inequality at workplace is linked to other aspects like age, marital status and class background of working women in Nepal. Intersectionality is a useful framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages (Davis, 2008). It takes account on people’s overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face. With this reference, I have applied intersectionality to discuss how do the educated working women experience intersectional discrimination in professional life linked to their gender, age, marital status and class background.

## **Chapter- Four**

### **Research Method and Data Collection**

There are a number of studies on gender inequalities in labour market which are grounded on quantitative method of research (for example, Pokharel 2008, Gautam 2009, Wadman 2014). Such studies have included the data through questionnaire and surveys. However, such studies are criticized for their rigid account of the context, that is, they are not able to incorporate subjective ideas and experiences of participants and contexts which are important to explore workplace experiences and challenges to professional women. This implies that there is a need of adopting the qualitative approach which can accommodate a wide range of the data related to challenges of working women in their professional career.

There are also few studies which have adopted qualitative approaches. For example, Coyle et.al (2014) studied insecurities of working women in Nepal adopting interview. Similarly, Huo (2013) adopted both survey and interview to collect the data from Chinese male and female participants. Ferdoos (2005) adopted qualitative method that has been used to explore the social status of rural and urban working women in Pakistan. Likewise, Rai (2015) adopted in-depth interview to collect the data from youth and students to explore gender inequality in politics in Nepal.

By acknowledging these methods of research on gender inequality, it is argued that since gender inequality is prevailed in dynamic aspects, we need to adopt dynamic methodology which helps to collect rich information about socio-economic contexts as well as personal beliefs of the individual. Considering this fact, I have adopted qualitative method in this study.

#### **4.1. Method of Study**

I have applied a qualitative research method with semi-structured interview. The purpose of the study is to explore the challenges experienced by educated working women in their career and work/life balance which is difficult to study through statistics. On this basis, I found qualitative research method more convenient and reasonable to apply in this study. It made use of both primary and secondary sources of data; However, primary sources of data were the basis for the research. The narratives of the six informants collected through the interview were the primary data for the research. As secondary sources of data, I consulted various books, journal articles and websites related to the topic.

Qualitative method produces vivid and rich account of human experience that emphasizing depth of understanding. Silverman (2013) also states that it attempts to subjectively tap the deeper meaning of human experiences in particular times and describes how people organize their world and produce meaning to their life. Through semi-structured interview, the researcher can get closer to the interviewee and collect empirical data in detail. It is the main tool for qualitative data collection, which is effective for this research because it gives participants opportunity to choose their own words especially in a particular subject (Bryman, 2012).

Though there are lots of critics on qualitative research, it fits in my study. Silverman 1993 (as cited in Bryman 2012) has been particularly critical of account of qualitative research that do not acknowledge the variety of forms that the research strategy can assume. As my study is based on the human's lived experiences like understanding and challenges this can best be described by the qualitative research only. No any statistical data can evaluate and analyse them. Thus, I chose only a single method to explore the experiences and understanding according to my research purpose.

#### **4.2. Study Area**

For practical reasons, the research was carried out in Kathmandu<sup>4</sup>, Nepal. Kathmandu is the capital of the nation as well as the economic, political, social and cultural center in Central Nepal. There are numbers of reasons behind the selection of this area. First, my familiarity with the circumstances and the environment in the city can be helpful for choosing the most appropriate informants and conducting interviews. Second, more educated women are involved in different professions that supports to easy access to the informants. Third, the inequalities in workplaces can be widely seen even if there are educated people in this site so that I can explore the challenges faced by educated women in their professional career. Moreover, no other researchers have conducted any research about inequality in workplaces with gender perspective in this region.

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<sup>4</sup> Kathmandu is the Capital city of Nepal also a major economic center of the country.

### 4.3. Selection of Informants

The informants of the study were six women working in Kathmandu who were selected through purposive sampling. I have used purposive sampling technique for the identification and selection of information-rich participants for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. While conducting this study, it helped me to focus on particular characteristics of the informants that are of interest, which had best enabled me to answer my research questions. I selected only educated women working in different professions like in teaching, business and civil service presuming that they could provide more information about gender-based inequalities prevailed in different occupations. Among six informants, two of them were teachers, two were in business and remaining two were civil servants. Most of the participants were between the age 20 to 30 except one of 35 years. Four of them were married and remaining two were unmarried. Therefore, the study has diverse participants for the sources of data. The rationale in doing so was that a purposively selected diverse sample offers the high possibility of identifying the full range of factors connected with this research. It also creates many possible experiences of an event that makes the research further precise and accurate. I have used alphabets (A, B, C, D, E and F) to keep the name of the participants anonymous.

Initially, I interviewed two informants working as teacher in private schools<sup>5</sup> in Kathmandu whom I contacted through my own social network. I shared my research project with them, and then asked each of these initial two interviewees to suggest other educated women working in civil service and business in Kathmandu. The process of snowball sampling proved to be an effective technique in studying small and difficult-to-contact populations such as educated working women in civil service and business in Nepal (Davies-Netzley, 1998). With this approach to sampling, I made initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the study topic and then used these to establish contacts with others (Bryman, 2012). I got the contact number of the informants from my colleagues and later contacted to the informants to confirm the date, time and venue for the interview.

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<sup>5</sup> Nepal has two primary types of schools: community and institutional. Community (public) schools receive government grants, and institutional (private) schools are self-funded. The private schools are run an individual or a group as their personal belonging.



#### **4.4. Tools and Techniques for Data Collection**

This study is based on the primary data i.e. the firsthand information collected from the participants. The primary investigative tool for the data collection was the semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions (Bryman, 2012). I followed semi-structured interview because it allows to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies. The use of semi-structured method of the interview was helpful to pivot around the research question in more detail and gave original responses of the informants.

Prior to interview, the guidelines were prepared with qualitative open-ended questions to elicit information from the informants (please see appendix I). The informants were asked questions concerning; their age, marital status, educational and occupational background; how they became involved in work; and, details about their professional life experiences and work/life balance. Personal interviews were conducted in different times in the topic of discussion. The emergent issues were recorded carefully.

#### **4.5. Data Collection Procedure**

First, I personally met the selected participants and explained the purpose of the study. I asked them to decide time and place for discussion and build rapport with each other. Before taking the interview, general discussion was conducted among the participants related to the objectives of the study. As per my interview guidelines, the participants were individually interviewed. All the interviews were conducted face-to face. For personal interview, the time and place were decided as per their convenience. I selected English as the medium of interview because my informants were educated and could communicate in English. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed to analyze and interpret the data.

#### **4.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

I used narrative analytical tool while analysing the data. This research tool helped me to understand how people are representing themselves, or their experiences, to themselves and to others (Reisman, 2008). I used narrative analytical tool in the interpretative paradigm to explore and understand how individuals interpret their everyday lived experiences. After the interview with the six informants, I transcribed the collected data for analysis. I grouped the commonalities that emerged in all interviews under three dominant themes: Gender at work, difficulties the working women encounter with and work/life balance. Then, I reviewed each theme under several sub-topics and looked at the relationships among the themes to determine how they could be connected and supported by the responses of the informants. To make easy for the readers, I presented the quotes from the informants and analysed them in each section. Previous research and theoretical framework gave me insight in interpretations from narratives. In last chapter, I backed up my findings with the previous research and theories.

#### **4.7. Limitations of the Study**

The scope of this study has been limited to the challenges educated working women face in their professional career including their experiences on work/life balance. This study has focused in the women working in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Hence, this study has reflected the context of gender-based inequalities in workplaces of one district of Nepal. Similarly, only six women were selected with purposive sampling procedure who belong to three different professions; teaching, business and civil service. With these reasons, it may not fully correspond to the situation in other diverse professions. Although it might have been worthwhile to choose the informants who were more conscious and deliver the information on the issue, the research results would be balanced.

Likewise, only educated women were selected as the sample population so that it may not be generalized to general practice and perception of gender discrimination. The primary data were collected using semi-structured interview. It was kept within a set parameter of 'Experiences of educated working women in the workspace' to avoid the possible digression and deviation from the research question as well as to make it spontaneous and realistic. But still it might not be freer and conversational with my informants so far as unstructured interview. In this sense, the conclusion of this study might not represent the entire scenario of gender-based inequalities throughout the country. However, the findings of this study will exemplify the majority of educated working women in different occupations.

#### **4.8. Ethical Issues**

Ethics plays very important role in research by providing respect to the subject and minimizing negative consequences by controlling the unlimited power of the researcher (Baker, 1999 as cited in Kafle, 2017). While researching on any subjects, the researcher has to consider the high ethical standards to protect the privacy, dignity as well as interests of the informants. I am also concerned about the ethical issues in the process of interviewing, as some questions might be sensitive to some of the informants. For instance, I was very careful to ask the questions about how the informants experience harassment in the workplace. Considering this fact, as a social researcher, I was fully responsible to follow each ethical code presented in every procedure.

##### **4.8.1. Informed Consent**

During my thesis, I was very careful to the issues like the prior informed consent (see appendix II), maintaining confidentiality and privacy of the research subject, anonymity etc. Each informant has the right to know the purpose of the study and have a clear idea about what the information will be used for. So, I explained them well about the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Consent was obtained from informants before each interview. During the interview, I was also very concerned to ask the questions about physical, mental and sexual harassment as they are sensitive issues from social perspectives in Nepal. To manage it ethically, primarily, I build a rapport with the informants and convinced them to answer.

#### **4.8.2. Reliability and Validity of the Study**

As the area of the study was familiar place to me, my role as a researcher was insider. I had worked as a teacher in school and college in Kathmandu. Thus, my previous knowledge on the topic was helpful to raise the meaningful questions in a way the respondents can understand easily rather than doubting in terms of reliability and ethical considerations during the study. Though reliability and validity are complex and controversial in qualitative research, Patton (2002) states that qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. Reliability simply refers to the repeatability and consistency of research methods while validity can be defined as the degree to which the findings of research match the reality (Golafshani, 2003 in Thapa 2009). To get accurate and trustworthy finding of the study, I was very careful in selecting the informants and research tool. I had selected six informants of diverse backgrounds to explore the challenges of educated working women in their professional career and work/life balance. I was also very careful to prepare my research tool, that is in-depth interview with open ended questions. On this basis, I strongly hope that my study has reached to valid and reliable findings.

## Chapter-Five

### Presentation and Analysis of the Data

While analysing the data, this study initially focuses on the informants' background information about their age, level of education, occupation and marital status. The recorded interviews of each informant were transcribed and grouped under the common themes that emerged from all interviews. Narrative analytical tool is used to analyse the interview of the informants which Riessman (2008) describes as an analysis of individual's account of an event or experience. This type of analysis makes diverse-yet equally substantial and meaningful-interpretations and conclusions by focusing on different elements.

In the analysis, the data collected are categorized into three main aspects: perspectives towards profession, hurdles they face and experiences on balancing work/life. Although those themes consist of the groundwork for analysis, other sub-themes also helped to highlight the main topics. I have used the alphabet P (for participant) and (A...F) to code the six individual informants. The following table shows the demographic profile of the informants.

In the proceeding topics, I will show the reasons to join in the occupation as well as problems they encounter in their professional career, in detail. I will conclude my study with their experiences related on balancing work family life. Here, while presenting these facts, I will put my findings on their experiences that I gathered from the interviews.

**Table 5.1. Background information of the participants**

<b>Code of the participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Marital status</b>
PA	23	Bachelor	Civil service	Assistant Legal Advisor	Unmarried
PB	35	Master	Civil service	Administrative Officer	Married
PC	26	Higher Secondary	Teaching	Teacher (Primary level)	Married
PD	30	Bachelor	Business	Accountant	Married
PE	21	Bachelor	Business	Junior Marketing Officer	Unmarried
PF	28	Master	Teaching	Teacher (Secondary level)	Married

Table 5.1 above presents the background information of the informants especially their age, level of education, occupation, working position and marital status. I have interviewed six informants of different age groups: especially most of them are in between 20 to 30 years. The informants for this study are working in the professions like teaching, civil service and business. Among them PA and PB in civil service, PD and PE in business sector and PC and PF are in teaching sector.

Regarding education, among six informants; three informants (PA, PD, PE) have passed Bachelor level education; other two informants (PB, PF) have the qualification of Master level and one informant (PC) have passed higher secondary level. The informants, I chose purposively, were relatively aware and educated. Table 5.1 also indicates that four of them (PB, PC, PD, PF) are married; they are having the multiple responsibilities as wife, mother or daughter at home and the employee at workplace. Two informants (PA and PE) are unmarried.

### **5.1. Women and Professional career**

As introduced, Nepal has predominantly been a patriarchal society where women are generally subordinate to men in virtually every aspect of life. Recent decades have witnessed unprecedented changes in workforce composition, resulting in women's increased involvement in the labor force. Women are participating in multiple sectors of workforce like civil service, teaching, business etc. However, inequality is prevailed in almost all the sectors. To explore this inequality, it is important to know the occupational position of the participants I have selected. With this purpose, I asked to them about their occupation.

The table 5.1 shows that the proportion of informants vary significantly within various organizational levels. PA and PB are working in civil service sector. PC and PF are working as teachers, and PD and PE are working in business sector. Except PB and PF, other informants are confined to lower level positions within organizations. PB is working as an administrative officer in civil service and PF is working as a secondary level teacher. Whereas, PA works in civil service as an assistant legal advisor; PC is working in a primary school as a teacher; PD works in a bank as an accountant and PF is working as a junior marketing officer in a business firm. This clearly states that there is male domination in labour market in Nepal. Men are working in the higher position whereas women are involved in lower positions in many workplaces. Only very few of them are at the top level.

### 5.1.1. Perception towards the current profession

Along with the male members, the selected informants participate in paid economic activities in labour market. They are among the few working women in Nepal involved in paid job. Though women in Nepal are able to have careers, there are still only some specific jobs that women tend to have. For example, teaching, hotel management and tourism etc. are industries that women heavily dominate in the Nepalese work force. To know about the women's perception towards their current occupation it was important to know: Why did they choose this profession? Whose decision was it? Was it their own decision or someone else's? I have further tried to explore did the informants consider joining this profession while they were studying.

On my query, PC said,

*Working as a teacher in primary school is an interesting job. It is fun to be with children and teach to them. I became a teacher because my parents wanted to see me as a teacher. My family believes that it is a safe, secure and suitable job to me. I was interested teaching in primary school because teacher get more support and respect in the family. Many of my friends are working as teacher in different schools. I am teaching in a primary school. It was also easy to get the job in teaching in primary level as the vacancy was only for female teachers.*

PC's response reveals that the decision of the family matters a lot for choosing the profession. She stated that teaching is an attractive profession for her because of two reasons: it is easy to get this job as the priority is given to females in vacancy for teaching primary level and family wanted her to be a teacher. Women are considered good at nurturing or care which is most needed for primary level students. The family also feel teaching as an easy, safe and secure occupation. Therefore, many women are involved in teaching in primary schools in Nepal. In this way, choosing profession is a way of doing gender because of a desired femininity. In Nepal, teaching in primary school is mostly feminized and recommended to women both by school management and family members. This shows that gendered assumptions about jobs lead to a specific form of doing femininity or masculinity (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Similarly, PD says,

*[...] well, I am a married woman. After my marriage I felt in-appropriate that whole family is dependent on one male member. My husband's salary was not enough. The prices were escalating rapidly, and it was difficult to fulfill our needs with only my husband's income. I could see other women joining workforce and contributing towards home uplift, so I also decided to join workforce to make our living comfortable. I wanted to be an Engineer. But I could not be.*

She recalls her uncle, when she was still a student and asking for career advice, as saying,

*Engineering is for boys while girls are supposed to study management and work in banks.*

With PD's narrative, I notice men should bear more financial responsibilities for the family than women in Nepal. This phenomenon is also a cultural legacy. It confirms the traditional cultural view that men should be working outside home while women inside home – men over the exterior world and women over the domestic world (Huo, 2013). This placed men in dominant positions and secondary to women, for example, PD is only working to support her husband financially to fulfill their family needs. She chose to work as an accountant because her family wants to see her working in bank. She further pointed out that several jobs in Nepal are categorized as 'women's work' and 'men's work' like 'engineering' for men and 'working in banks' for women. Though she wanted to study and work as an engineer, due to gendered assumption regarding work, she chose feminine suitable job. In this way, PD's narrative points out that choosing a job is a way of doing gender.

PB had a different opinion on it. She states,

*For me I knew where I wanted my career to go but I didn't know how to do it! Parts of my career progression were my conscious decisions. I knew I wanted to achieve a certain position before I was a certain age. I was interested in civil service since my school level study. It was my dream career because I was willing to work as officer in the administration since I have completed my school. It is one of the leading posts with respect and handsome salary which is good for my career and fulfill family's need. I get more respect in family and society like men.*



PD's view indicates that they have to give more priority to their family background before choosing the job. She took this responsibility to support their family financially. It is dominant traditionally in Nepalese societies. She further explained that she wanted to be an engineer but the socially determined norms for work to men and women compelled to change her mind. In contrast, PB expressed different opinion that she chose to work in civil service with her own will. High pay and dignity in the family and society like men fascinated her to this sector. It further clarifies that high position in civil service is associated to men's work in Nepal and women working in that position get the same value despite of her gender. This shows administrative officer in civil service is gendered as masculine regardless of whether a woman is performing the job.

In conclusion, the above excerpts reflect that informants have diverse feelings regarding choosing their job. Informants' narratives indicated that Nepalese women's main source of decision to join the job is family. Interestingly, it is found that women working in a job perceived as 'feminine' and men working in a job seen as 'masculine' are enacting femininity and masculinity respectively. Here, gender identity is done through engaging in a job that is either 'masculine' or 'feminine'. This supports Leidner (1991) who argues that individuals doing jobs are doing gender at the same time.

### **5.1.2. Equality at work: Expectation and reality**

The informants passionately expressed their views about expectations they had before joining the job and reality they experienced regarding equality after joining the job. On my query on the reality after getting the job, PA said,

*I faced a lot of hardships before, and then, I got an opportunity to work as a legal advisor. During the interview too, I was asked a curve ball question like 'Are you married?' or 'Do you plan on having children?' I am the only female staff working in this section. All other members are men. People believe that studying law and working in legal sector is 'men's work.' So, I found challenging to work in this field being a woman. Though I am not being discriminated in pay, I faced discrimination in work responsibility.*

This quote highlights that gender inequality in workplace has not been decreased in Nepal. PA's narrative says that many working women in Nepal face stereotype as people believe that legal advisor is not suitable job for women. She was asked gender stereotype questions in interview for hiring concerning her personal background such as marital status and planning of pregnancy. This shows how gender intersects with age and marital status. She points out that the association of this work with 'masculinity' means that women can never meet the standards that are expected. This stereotypical gender assignment of the jobs raises difficulties for the women at work (Hall, 1993). Another big gender gap exists when it comes to expectations of women in regard of equal opportunities in the workplace. PD said,

*I have to prove myself more as a woman while doing work in my office. They do not easily accept my work. They only give me the responsibilities in customer service. I feel that they have doubt in ability to manage orders and deliveries. Only male colleagues are asked to handle it. If I share my idea regarding the problems occurred during the work, they just oppose and say, 'Maybe...but that's not a good idea'. They never take my opinion seriously. There is a kind of silent hostility out there towards women in business. They feel like I have taken what belongs to them.*

She symbolically used the word 'they' to represent 'men' and explicitly stated that business is considered as men's work in Nepal and woman who enters in this field has to face hostile manner from them. Here, the men's expectation to see only men in business is a kind of doing gender. It shows the reality, even though, women can work now, their competitiveness is considered much weaker than men when dividing for work responsibilities. Men possess advantages. So, it is just a change of the manifestation mode of gender inequality.

## **5.2. Gender Still Matters: Difficulties Encountered in Professional Career**

Today, there is no field where the women have not shown their worth. From holding highest public office in bureaucracy to holding highest political position, the women have shouldered all kinds of responsibilities with grand success. However, Nepalese working women still face barefaced discernment at their workplaces (Coyle et.al, 2014). Women are employed in many sectors, but their contribution is devalued, or their works are not taken as the works equally important with that of male workers. In this regard, in this study I have analysed the major difficulties that my informants encountered in the workplaces.

### 5.2.1. Gender pay gap

Pay gap between men and women is one of the issues the informants brought up during the interviews. Pay gaps describe the discrepancy between the salary and benefits given to men compared to those given to women for the same level and quality of work. The wage gap can be explained by the women's unequal position in the labour market, both horizontally and vertically (Zhao, 2017). The horizontal inequality between women and men describes under-representation of women in different sectors, industries, occupations, organizations or workplaces. A vertical segregation, on the other hand, means that women are under-represented in higher positions. It takes place when wage differentiation stems from reasons other than employee efficiency (Zwiech, 2009). As an important issue of my study, I have asked the informants whether they get the equal pay like their male counterpart or not.

The narratives of PE and PC explained the status of wage distribution at their workplaces. PE said,

*There is no uniformity in the pay between me and my male colleagues. He has been the given major responsibilities by the manager. He prefers male colleague thinking that I may not manage time to work longer hours and can not fully concentrate on my work because of family obligations. He considers me as less capable to work as men. Like one of my friends, I had asked for raising the salary. But the boss refused and gave me the option to leave job if I am not happy with the salary. He says, you do the easy job than your male colleagues'.*

The informant reveals the fact that there is unequal distribution of pay to male and female worker in many workplaces especially in business sector in Nepal. Mainly, women working in private institutions get less pay than men. She indirectly pointed out that wage or salary is determined by the management team in her workplace and there is no transparent wage distribution system in private institutions. PE stated that men are more favoured and demanding to the boss than women in business sector in Nepal. They were given more responsibilities as well as more salary.

Her narrative further states that there is still stereotype thought that women can not be focused and work longer hours due to the family responsibilities. Women's work is also considered easy and no stress work than men. With this reason, they are given less pay than men. Therefore, organizational practice to favour men more than women seems to create inequality in work responsibilities between men and women and, then, ultimately it influences on pay gap.

PC has same narrative as PE,

*I do not get the same salary at my workplace. I knew in that day when they hired a man in the same position. He had the same educational credentials and similar levels of experience—but the man was hired as a senior marketing officer with more pay rather than the junior officer. It made his job sound more important and helped justify a pay raise, even though his responsibilities were exactly the same as mine. They say, 'you are still too young.'*

This excerpt depicts that women working in schools are getting less paid than the men working at the same position in Nepal. PC expressed that a man with the same qualification and experience with the more pay was hired rather than promoting the women from the lower position. It is because her pay is intersected with her age. They think that she is still young to get promoted and for more pay. It shows that young working women's competences and skills are unrecognized in many workplaces in Nepal. PC & PE generally think that the main problem is still a cultural one. It is in some way self-evident that men earn more and get into higher salary classes quicker. Moreover, women often have too little self-esteem to ask for a better payment and therefore accept these inequalities towards the employer.

On the contrary, PB has a different view,

*I am getting the same pay as my male colleagues. It is ensured by the government, so I have not experienced about unequal pay in civil service.*

PB convinced that inequalities between wages are not seen within the civil service sector, as the salary pattern is completely visible and comprehensible. Women working in civil service get the same pay as men in Nepal. The pay scale is determined by the government and distributed equally to men and women in a transparent way. It is good to see that women working in civil service get treated as men because higher position job in civil service is considered as men's work in Nepal. This example shows clearly how gendered assumptions about jobs lead to a specific form of 'doing femininity' or 'masculinity'. However, the salary class systems are differently structured in the private sector and not publicly accessible in Nepal so that other informants experienced the inequalities in the pay.

In conclusion, it is found that informants' wage intersected with their gender, age and organizational practices to create pay gap in Nepalese labour market. Other factors such as cultural bias, societal assumptions and a lack of progress in workplace design also contribute indirectly to the gender pay gap. Through the narratives, I found the two reasons for doing gender in pay. First, women and men still tend to work in different types of jobs. Not only does society consider jobs to be gendered, that is, men's jobs and women's jobs, but such work is also accorded different value. Pay scales for jobs requiring similar skills, qualifications or experience tend to be lower when they are predominantly done by women. Second, women's competences and skills are undervalued in the promotion rates in an organization because of gender stereotypes that perceive women as less competent or 'managerial' (Zhao, 2017) and offer low pay to them.

### **5.2.2. Gender influence in Professional advancement**

The extent to which working women have the opportunity for professional advancement in senior managerial roles is also an issue of interest in the study. In this regard, the working women were asked whether they get same opportunity to be promoted. For example, head teacher, manager, senior administrative officer. Very few of them consider that they get same opportunity to be promoted. In this regard, PA said,

*I do not think, me and my male colleagues have the same opportunities because they are promoted in the higher positions easily and within the short time. I was working in the same position for two years but still I am not being promoted. Instead, my male colleague was promoted within one year. The manager does not trust on my abilities that I can work in promoted position.*

PA experienced workplace discrimination as a woman and remained sensitive to and opposed to the persistent sexism that pervades the Nepalese workplaces. PA, too, recognized how being a woman put her at a disadvantage. Even though she saw her workplace (civil service) as less oppressive than others, she noticed how becoming a man gave him entree to his desired future career that was denied to her as a woman (Connell, 2010). In this way, it suggests that doing gender is associated with inequality between working men and women.

PA's quote also reveals that the breakdown of trust is especially common when the man is manager and woman is his worker in workplaces in Nepal. This lack of trust is one of the reasons for discrimination at workplace which hinders women to their professional advancement. Burdened by stereotypes, myths and other hidden assumptions about the women employees, he does not trust her to get the job done (Ridgeway, 1997). According to the informant, she has been marginalized because the manager does not believe on her ability that she also can handle the higher position. It looks at the symbolism attached to this activity in which the 'masculine' is seen as superior to the 'feminine'(ibid).

Similarly, PD had a similar view;

*My desires do not count here. I would be certainly be happy to be promoted in the manager position. But who is proposing my name? The director and the management committee do not know me.*

The informant stated that she is not treated fairly where she works when it comes to promotions and advancement. This reveals that women who work in majority-male workplaces feel much discriminated in Nepal. It seems to be that there is a male culture in the leadership. Since most leaders are men, they also propose men into a leadership position. PD's narrative shows that business is a male-dominated industry in Nepal where men stick together in a clique and tend to exclude female employees. They go as far as to mock them or make them feel inadequate. Thus, whatever is gendered 'feminine' tends to be devalued; whatever is gendered 'masculine' receives higher status and is perceived as more professional and as representing competence in workplaces in Nepal. This analysis shows the doing of gender as practices of subordination and domination where the subordinate position in this logic is 'femininity', 'masculinity' becomes the dominant (Hall, 1993).

Although PF agreed that she does not get the same opportunity to be promoted like male colleagues, she expressed her idea in a different way.

*I have never thought of becoming a head teacher. That requires frequent visit to the district headquarters, frequent participation in meetings, frequent interaction with government officials. Due to responsibilities to home and family, it is hard for me to work in that position. I have to cook food, clean the house, take care of children and family when I reach to home. I have to give more time at home too like my work.*

This informant expressed clearly that gender as barrier to professional advancement of working women in Nepal. Their position is confined in lower level not only by the gender stereotype and male domination but also by the family responsibilities assigned to them. As PF said, women in Nepal are considered solely responsible for child-care and family responsibilities. She should think first her family responsibilities like cooking food, cleaning the house and to take care of her children and parents which she can no neglect. Working in higher position needs more concentration and maybe longer hours at work. She has to be participated different meetings, seminars, trainings and get more workload while working in the higher position. It makes easy to understand that the informants gendered role is linked to their career development.

In sum, for the most part, women are identified as ‘forgotten entities’ in their workplaces (Bista, 2006). It shows the fact that women are forgotten in men’s world. They experience that masculine is valued more highly than the feminine in their workplaces. They are not being promoted to higher positions like their male-counterparts. It is because of stereotype notion that higher position jobs are for men. Therefore, there is virtually less opportunities to women to be promoted in higher position in many workplaces in Nepal.

### **5.2.3. Harassment at the Workplace**

The informants who are working in different workplaces like business, school, civil service etc. are no exception on experiencing the harassment. It is one of the main problems faced by working women as they are considered an easy target by the male colleagues. Women in Nepal are much vulnerable and colleagues and higher management harass them by passing inappropriate remarks or making fun of them or in extreme cases they harass them sexually (Bista, 2006).

To explore challenges to working women in the workplace, I have to ask to the informants whether they have been exploited physically or mentally at the workplace or not. I was afraid that this may bring unpleasant feeling to the informants. Therefore, I was very careful during the interview. As it is considered a very sensitive topic to discuss in traditional Nepalese society, the informants did not want to share it at the very first. Later, after building a good rapport, I was able to convince them to share their opinion on this matter.

PC opined,

*Yes, I have been exploited both physically and mentally many times. There is a perception that men can do anything to working women. My seniors give me pressure with more workload. They ask and check me many times with the doubt on my work. I am younger than others: sometimes, the male colleagues do inappropriate remarks about my physical appearance.*

Regarding harassment at workplace, as described by PC, this has direct influence on informants' personal and professional life. Women in Nepal are perceived as weak and emotional which make them vulnerable to physical and mental harassment. Men think about her in a wrong way and assume that those women having a friendly kind of nature inside workplace male member generally think that they can do anything with her. PC also has indicated that she faces the problems like mental stress, excessive workload, sexual harassment, discriminatory practices, safety and security issues etc. She stated that she gets a lot of mental stress due to frequent doubt on her work. Not only the mental stress, she gets unnecessary remarks about her body structure time and again by some of the male colleagues. That results to health-related problems like general weakness, tiredness, work pressure etc.

Similarly, PE supports PC's opinion. She said,

*I have faced a lot of physical and mental harassment at the workplace. At times, male colleagues try to misbehave me. I also have to work more than them. I know I am not being treated in a decent way. They use vulgar words and make comments. They do not even care that I am around. But, what else can I do? I have just the option; either ignore it or quit the job. [...] Not only the male but some female co-workers also exploit me mentally. Many times, they spread negative rumors about my character and upbringing.*



From this narrative, the informant expressed that she faced both physical and mental harassment at the workplace. At first, she explicitly stated that the male colleagues behave her negatively. There are more men working in her workplace. They often tease, comments and use rough words ignoring her. It shows that there is men's hegemony or like male's club in many workplaces where women are harassed both physically and mentally. One more interesting, but bitter fact informant revealed was that female colleagues also give mental stress, like indulging in jealous behavior, unnecessary gossip and rivalry (Kumari, 2014). All of them agreed that their female colleagues spread negative rumors about one's character and upbringing. Their female colleagues also try to harass by creating confusion and misunderstanding with superiors and complain about other females.

But PB expressed her view in a different way:

*Working as an officer in civil service, I have not faced any physical harassment at workplace. I work in one of the higher positions, so nobody tries to do that. In nominal cases, I have faced mental stress only due to excessive workload.*

Except PB, other participants expressed that they face harassment in above mentioned form at the workplace. PB is working in higher position in civil service in Nepal, in contrast, other informants are working in lower positions in different workplaces. It shows that women working in lower positions and also unmarried are more vulnerable to harassment at workplaces. Sometimes the stress is so profound that they feel like leaving their jobs but then they realize that these are all a part of life that they have to fight and endure. They shared the view that gender discrimination also happens because working men think that they are not capable enough to work properly and unable to take decision in a better way.

However, it is not the same to PB working in civil service. As an officer, she expressed that she has not experienced any physical harassment in her workplace. She is treated like men because of her occupational position. It is found that gender itself does not create inequality; the process of doing gender creates hierarchy which results inequality in the workplaces. In PB's case, though she is women, her performance within the organization established an accepted gender role as men.

It concludes that gender arises from and is explicitly reinforced through the performances—or, otherwise expressed, the interactive discourses—individuals act out within given organizational sagas (Lester, 2008). Similarly, intersectionality looks at the relationships between different forms of identity and as expressed by the informants, there is connection between their gender, age, marital status, class background and the organization practices. It was reported that young, unmarried women are more vulnerable to sexual harassments than the married women. Likewise, the informants working in teaching and business sectors face more physical and mental harassment than working in civil service sector.

#### **5.2.4. Sense of Being Ignored or Neglected at Work**

Another difficulty explored in the study is feeling of being ignored or neglected. One can feel ignored or neglected when the environment fails to give the due attention, recognition and consideration that one deserves (Bista, 2006). In this study, I have discussed about this issue because it is directly connected with the discrimination prevailed in the workplace. To explore the opinions of the participants, I have asked them whether their efforts are fully recognized by their boss or not. I have assumed that this will also help me to know how they feel working in the environment that is male dominated.

In this regard, PA said,

*I am never involved in any kind of decision making. The office organizes review meetings time and again. I also participate in those meetings; my participation does not matter anything because they never listen my voice regarding any important issues. In most decisions, male colleagues are regularly engaged in making whole range of decisions about how the office should be managed and run or how resources should be spent further. I am excluded from all of these games.*

There are clear gender differences in being neglected or ignored at work in Nepalese labour market. PA indicated that men showed their strong and active participation in decision making at the work in Nepal. They often engage in making decisions whereas women are not given priority in participating in decision making roles. Here, it is also interesting to notice that women and men used different ways to get their work done. While women focused on minor works in the workspace, men focused on major decision-making roles. At the same time men's work was more in line with the efficiency goals of the organisation and as such valued more highly than the women's work. Thus, in this context, 'doing gender' is linked to activating symbolic hierarchies and in these symbolic hierarchies the 'masculine' is valued over the 'feminine' (Korvajärvi,1998).

Likewise, PE opined,

*My boss recognizes my efforts, but it is just to show me. I am not being involved when the important meetings are held. My role in decision making are fully avoided. Though I am doing my work sensibly, I have not got any reward from him yet. And this sometimes, demotivates me to work.*

The narrative of PE explains that the role of women is ignored due to the male dominated setting in Nepalese business sector. Though she works as male colleagues, her works are not fully recognized by her boss. The women involved in business sector are not accepted by the men working in the same field. Her narrative shows that business is perceived as suitable profession for men only in Nepalese context. They doubt on her competence, skills and ability to take quick decision which they believe men only have. She also expressed that she had not got any reward yet from her boss. In her case, gender results in a classification of work roles between masculine and feminine, which in turn results in dominant and subordinate statuses, depending on what roles are prescribed for what sex category, and the resources and power that attend them (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In conclusion, efforts of women in many workplaces are not fully recognized by the boss. They are likely to be ignored or neglected in the male dominated environment. Here, it is found, as Crenshaw (1991) says, one identity category is instead treated as dominant; social power ‘works to exclude or marginalize those who are different’. They work as men and/or better than men, but their identities are often devalued due to negative stereotype and prejudices towards their gender. Not only her gender identity but also her age is linked to this form of discrimination at the work.

### **5.2.5. Availability and Adequacy of Facilities**

With all the time you spend on the job, it’s important that your working conditions be healthy, happy and at least somewhat harmonious. After all, you may spend more time with your co-workers than you do with your family. To maintain good working environment at the workplace, it is needed to see whether the facilities to the employees are available and adequate or not. During the interview, I have asked the participants about the facilities they get at the workplace. I also focused on to get the information about whether they are appropriate and adequate to them or not.

PF said,

*I am working in a privately-owned school. I do not think the workplace facilities are favourable and adequate to me. There is no separate washroom, setting room and changing room at my workplace. Most of them are men so the essential facilities are constructed considering men. I have to compromise it in my place. Regarding asking for leave, I have to request and convince my boss to take leave if I get sick or during pregnancy.*

This narrative of PF demonstrates that the work facilities are not appropriate to her because they are not gender friendly. It seems that the needs of the informants working in private institutions are devalued because the facilities are focused to male workers. Her opinion further explains that she had to answer to the boss many times to take leave in the condition of sickness and pregnancy, but it depends on her boss who decides how long she can take. This shows women working as teacher get limited access to the essential facilities. The lack of common facilities makes them to feel terrible which ultimately may affect in their performances.

In this regard, PB, in her narrative, demonstrated different opinion.

*I found the facilities provided in my workplace are appropriate to me. The service-related facilities like sick leave, maternity leave, promotion, grades as well as infrastructural facilities like changing room, setting room, toilets are well maintained and equally distributed between men and women.*

Based on this narrative, it is easy for us to notify that informants working in civil service in higher position enjoys more both the service related and infrastructural facilities. Interestingly, it showed that the job in higher position is valued more highly than in teaching and business as it is seen as men's work. Therefore, women engaging in higher position can obtain a higher status and adequate facilities compared to their female colleagues who are doing in other jobs (Hall, 1993). It explains that the sex category seems less important compared to the gendered job enacted. So, gender inequality is embedded in the practice and maintenance of the gendered culture order through doing gender as individuals, in interaction, and as part of work organization.

### **5.3. Experiences on Balancing Work/Life**

Work- family balance is a term that refers to an individual's perceptions of the degree to which s/he is experiencing positive relationships between work and family roles, where the relationships are viewed as compatible and at equilibrium with each other (Nepali, 2018). It is a serious challenge for women workers in our society which is a traditional one and where women are still supposed to have greater family responsibilities. They have to fulfill the family responsibilities and also remain fully involved in their careers coping up with the competing demands of their multiple roles. Family work balance is a complex issue that involves financial values, gender roles, career path, time management and many other factors (ibid). Hidden values and models from our cultures, original families and other sources influence our choices in ways that we often don't anticipate or understand and that have far-reaching consequences for our lives. This issue is closely connected with my research question. So, here is my attempt to explore how the imbalance on their work and family life influences their career development in this study.

### 5.3.1. Multiple responsibilities, Multiple challenges

In regard of work/life balance, the informants have shared their diverse experiences. They have been playing vital roles in households before their professional career. Now women are also recognized for their value in the workplace and are engaged in wide range of activities of work in addition to their routine domestic work. Increased participation of women in labour market has intensified their dual responsibilities and roles. Consistently, working women face difficulties to integrate their work roles and responsibilities and manage time with household chores (Grady and McCarthy, 2008). The problem of maintaining a balance between work life and family life is not a new one. But in the recent few years social scientists have started paying more attention to it. Now there is growing concern in Nepal and experts are of the view that a constant struggle to balance both sets of life will have serious implications on women's career development. How the multiple responsibilities create challenges in their professional career was one of my questions to the informants. PC answered as follows:

*My husband has a very good job. He is often very busy...Even though I am also really busy at work, I still take care of the parents, children and domestic works much more than him. I do all my household works at night. While my men colleagues often go for a drink after work, me and my female coworkers usually have to go home in order to do some household chores and cook. I have not been outside the city yet to participate in meetings and trainings due to my family responsibility.*

PC's narrative allows us to point out that it is challenging to working women to balance work/life in Nepal. It shows that a problem still exists from a cultural perspective. All the informants agreed that household duties, as well as childcare are still seen as mostly female duties. Mostly, married working women have more family responsibilities in Nepal. Like PC, the married women have to take care of their children (if have), parents and manage all the household works behind their professional duties. This seems to limit her in the professional career as she is not able to participate in meetings and trainings. As soon as she finishes her work in the office, she should reach to home. on the contrary, her husband does not have any compulsion to household duties. He becomes busy only in his professional work. It makes easy to understand that gender intersects marital status of the women. Married working women face more difficulty to balance work/life because of unequal division of family responsibilities to their male counterparts.

Similarly, I was able to catch a response of PD on work/life sharing:

*I am a married woman and have double responsibility as I have to engage in managing the workplace and also have to run a house as well. I need to take full attention to take care of my husband, kids and in-laws. I get nominal support for shopping and teaching children from my husband and family members because it is a kind of tradition that women do housework. I think of leaving the job almost daily, but the financial constraints do not allow me to materialize it. Though I get tired, I have to maintain the balance between job and household chores anyway.*

All the working women in Nepal have the dual life; work life and family life where they have multiple responsibilities to fulfill. As PD said, she looks after all the household chores after her office work. Her narrative shows that Nepalese women (especially married women) are supposed to get less support for household chores and other family responsibilities from their husband and family members due to traditional stereotype belief. It seems that imbalance in between work and family responsibilities create conflict regarding to continue it or leave the job. PD stated that she often thinks to leave the job, but the financial condition compels her to balance anyway her work and family life. It shows that working women in Nepal often face imbalance in their work and family life.

In Nepal, still childcare and family responsibility are gendered as feminine, so women have to balance it anyway. Often, men only engage in certain tasks and are recommended to them by society such as for shopping and teaching children at home. At the same time, they are often praised for doing their job well as men are not expected to do a feminine-connoted task well. Through engaging in tasks requiring them to do what is constructed as 'femininity', men are perceived as violating the normative expectations of masculinity (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). This shows that gender identity raises difficulty for individual for work and family life balance. The respondent has shared that they work at night for longer hours to meet the expectations of their family. Most of the respondents have highlighted the behaviour of restlessness that disturbs the quality of their work and relation at home and workplace (Saher, et.al. 2013). With these responsibilities they feel challenging to continue the professional career longer. Therefore, most of the participants think to leave their job.

In contrast, PE expressed her opinion in different way,

*I belong to a small middle-class family. There are our members in my family; my parents, brother and me. I am the youngest member in the family. all of us are engaged in different professions. As an educated family, I get help from my family members to do my housework. My family does not believe on traditional gender stereotype that says only women are responsible for household chores. Sometimes, I work late in the evening, so my parents do the all the work at home. With their support it is easy for me to manage my work and family responsibility.*

PE's narrative shows that gender aspect intersected with different factors like age, class background, marital status. With reference to PE, it is found that working women of younger age get family support so that they have balance over work/life than the aged women. Similarly, the gender aspect of a woman from high class family is different from a low-class family (Crenshaw, 1989). It is found that there is less gender disparity in high class family. The traditional gender stereotype is seen to be followed by high class family. Men , too, equally participate in household chores which makes working women easy to balance work and family life. The narrative of PE reflected that women from low class family have to solely manage their family responsibilities whereas, in high class family they get help from their spouse and other family members for managing family responsibilities.

Married working women face more gender discrimination and imbalance in work/family life in Nepalese context. The unmarried get support for managing household work from their male family members, but the married participants do not. The informants admitted that family cooperation from other family members is very important in keeping work- family relations strong. They need support from the family system and spouse to make an appropriate assimilation both in family and the workplace (Ali, 2015). However, this study shows that for married participants help is confined to mere verbal commitments or assistance to children related affairs only. Their spouse and family members are more likely to take some part in grocery shopping and children's education, but very little beyond that.



Using an intersectional lens, this study provides insight into the fact that working women in Nepal still face barriers and challenges both in work and family life. Beyond the quotes of the narratives, it is easy for us to highlight the fact that age, sexual preferences, marital status and class background are crucial factors in the opportunities and obstacles that women face at work. Family and work life compete for women's time, energy and career development. It is found that family and household duties deplete energy of working women, leading to work/life imbalance which ultimately affects in their career development. Women take on a larger share of housework and childbearing and rearing responsibilities. Married women, particularly those who have children, often engage in less demanding and lower paying jobs so that they can combine family life with their career (Zhang et al. 2008). Thus, this study shows that married working women find it very hard to balance their work and personal life irrespective of the sector they are into, the age group they belong to and their class backgrounds.

## **Chapter- Six**

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I will the summary of the key findings of the study. The main agenda for my thesis is to explore the challenges of educated working women in Nepal. It has also specifically highlighted the difficulties to balance work/life and its influence in their career development. This study is based on the six interviews of the informants of different occupational background; teaching, business and civil service. I have used narrative analytical frame relating the theoretical framework to explicate the substantive findings of the study. This chapter also consists of the critical reflections of my own research which is further followed by concluding remarks and future research plan.

#### **6.1. Summary of the key findings**

To summarize the findings of my thesis, I have presented the conclusions made while analysing the interviews of the participants. The result of the study has shown that Nepal is a gender segregated country, specifically as to its labour market. Social and cultural barriers such as preference of men at work, lack of trust to women's ability and uneven division in household works do not permit equal work environment between male and female. Since, there is male domination in formal work, women who choose to work as teacher, in civil service and in business must work in lower positions. Women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by sociocultural and economic factors. In Nepal, the occupational choices for women are limited due to social and cultural constraints, family pressure, inherent gender bias and lack of supportive facilities. Very few of them are working in their desired field.

According to the narratives, there is also a wide difference between their expectation and the reality. It was assumed that educated working women get equity, equality and dignity in the workplaces. In contrast, they experience being placed in an inferior position because of employers' predetermined notion on women's primary role as homemakers and that compel women to look for jobs in the secondary sector of labor market where they are low paid with low status.

The other question that I approached in my study is ‘What difficulties or barriers they encounter at the workplace?’ I have concluded that gender still matters a lot in Nepalese labour market despite so many changes in socio-cultural and political sectors. The educated working women cope with gender-based inequalities in almost all the sectors. According to the narratives of the informants, Nepalese women have to deal with many socio-cultural challenges within the organizations. It shows that gender stereotypes are embedded in culture of the workplace.

In Nepalese labour force, not only women are paid less for the work but also less likely to be hired as permanent contract staff. It is found that women working in private institutions are not getting the equal pay like male colleagues. Wage distribution is based on favouritism in most of the private institutions and men are getting advantage of it. Men are favoured more than women in higher positions in teaching, business and civil service so that men get higher pay than women. Likewise, women are also less likely to be given permanent positions or be trained because of the perception that they may leave work for marriage or after they had a child.

Glass ceiling is found to be another challenge faced by Nepalese women and their career prospect. With the family-oriented expectation on women, they are discouraged to be participating in the senior level of management. Therefore, all the informants acknowledged that many barriers are there preventing them to move forward such as men’s hegemony at work, restriction in professional advancement, less recognition of women’s work and ignorance in decision making. Besides, Nepalese women are facing the higher wage gap like other South Asian countries (UNDP, 2010). It is commonplace to see that junior male employees are getting higher pay than senior female employees.

Harassments become a commonly implicit and subtle form of discrimination which is seen in both physical and mental aspects of working women. My research has indicated that they face mostly the problems like mental stress, sexual harassment, discriminatory practices, safety and security issues. Most of them are mentally harassed due to the more work loads, ignorance of their efforts, domination and lack of trust in their capability. Intersectionality looks at the relationships between different forms of identity.

The empirical data indicates that the gendered inequality my informants experience in labour market is closely related to other categories, most notably their age, marital status, class backgrounds, sectors where they work. For example, unmarried women are more vulnerable to sexual harassments. Likewise, women working in private institutions face more physical and mental harassment than the women working in civil service sector. Besides, women are also being harassed by their female colleagues or the seniors.

Regarding availability and adequacy of the facilities in the workplace, the women working in the private institutions are disappointed due to the lack of common gender-friendly facilities like separate toilets, changing room etc. in the private institutions, the sick leave and maternity leave also depends on the manager. In comparison, women working in civil service are satisfied for the facilities available.

As to their experiences on work/life balance, my study reveals that working women face numerous challenges to integrate their work and family activities. They experience work/life imbalance with various intensities depending on their social class, economic background of family, employed adults in a family, family support and involvement. It is a bigger challenge for working women in the incorporation of new roles and responsibilities as well as managing their time with children and family (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Married working women perform multiple roles at a given time than the unmarried girls. The respondents have shared that on one hand, they have to handle children, kitchen and other commitments at home and on the other hand, they have to meet the official assignments at their workplaces. My analysis highlights that involvement in multiple roles and demands; and expectations from the family and work creates conflicting situation for working women to manage their household and workplace responsibilities.

## **6.2. Some critical reflection of my own research practice**

During this study, I got some critical reflections which contradict to the prior research on gender inequality at the work and work-family life. Critical reflection is an effective tool to examine the research work which helps to explain what you have learnt otherwise. This study has allowed me to look at the notion of gender from different perspectives and how educated working women position themselves in relation to gendered stereotype, norms and culture. It also made me to think that gender still matters a lot to the educated professionals both in workplace and at home. Being women, they face the challenges not only by male domination but also by female counterparts in many cases. I became able to explore the reality that gender inequality is linked with marriage, age, occupation, social and family background etc.

However, it should be noted that some aspects of interview may not be fully considered. During the interview, it was difficult to prepare the informants to answer the question on harassment especially physical/sexual harassment. It is because of the belief, at the outset, that it is improper culturally to talk about experiences related to sex or sexual harassment, particularly to me as a young man. Among the six informants, only PB, PC and PE were willing to talk about this issue, while the remaining three informants chose not to answer. During the interview, as the rapport was built, at last, I was able to convince the remaining informants to share their experiences about sexual harassment. It can easily be concluded that for in-depth interview, I need to develop better skills to communicate with the informants. It is also wise to consider the order of the different questions or topics.

## **6.3. Concluding remarks and further research**

This thesis gives an insight on the gender-based inequalities prevailed in the workplaces in Nepal. It indicates that working women encounter multiple challenges in their professional career as well as in work/life balance. Gender wage disparity, fewer options in the career growth, lack of trust in women's ability, harassment both physically and mentally and unequal distribution of family responsibilities are the major hurdles they encounter. The roles and identities of working women are also devalued by men considering them less capable in Nepalese workforce which has made them marginalized. This has a tremendous impact on their professional career, their family life and ultimately to establish gender equality in socio-economic development.

While conducting this research, I discovered that there are many issues that are related to educated women's career development, for example, attitudes of family and society towards working women, status of rural and urban working women, glass ceiling as barrier in women's professional career, gender and work/life balance. Therefore, they would be interesting to study in the further research.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **1. Please describe about your background.**

- Age
- Level of education
- Marital status
- Do you have kids?

#### **2. Women and professional career**

- What is your current occupation?
- What position are you working now?
- Why did you choose to do this job?
- What was your career expectation when you were under education?
- Please describe your situation you had before your professional career.
- What is the reality after you got this job?

#### **3. Experiences at the workplace**

- Being a woman, how do you experience discrimination in your workplace? please explain the situation. What difficulties?
- Do you think men and women employees are on the same line regarding work responsibilities and wages in your workplace?
- Do you consider you and your male colleagues have the same opportunities to be promoted? If not, why? What do you think is the main reason to this?
- Have you ever been exploited, physically or mentally at your workplace? If yes, please explain the situation.
- Do you think your efforts are fully recognized by your boss?
- Are the work facilities appropriate for you?
- How is your relationship with your male co-workers?

#### **4. Challenges on work/life balance**

- Do you get any help from your spouse or family members for household activities?
- How do you organize your domestic duties after work?
- What kinds of help you often get from your family? Are they supportive to you?
- Have you ever experienced that your household work as barrier in your performance at workplace?

**Appendix II**  
**Informed Consent**

**Informed Consent for a Master Thesis in Social Science: Gender Inequality in Nepal:  
Challenges of educated working women in their professional careers**

I am a Master student in social work at the Department of Social Science, Nord University in Norway. I would like to invite you .....to participate in a Master thesis research about challenges that educated working women face in their professional career in Kathmandu. Your participation will be taken mainly in form of interviews. I would use pseudonym in the project instead of your real name in the thesis in order to protect your identity. This study is an academic one and will be shared amongst my supervisor and other appropriate members related to the Nord University. The Master thesis that results from this work will be published in a hard copy and will be housed at the Nord University library and the Department of Social Sciences at the Nord University, Norway. As a participant, you have the right to ask for more information about this study and to withdraw from the study any time during the interview.

I appreciate your cooperation to participate in this study. Thank you!

Mahendra Poudel .....

(Please sign below if you are willing to participate in the interview process for the Master thesis research study outlined above.)

Signature:.....

Date: .....