FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Women corporate leaders aspire to bigger roles, demand flexible working hours

Women executives aspire to climb the corporate ladder, but child-care responsibilities have created a speed-bump. Significant minorities report experiencing discrimination and exclusion from “old boys networks” in China and India. Women would like to have more flexible working hours as well as being able to take a few years break from work and re-enter smoothly. These are the findings from a pro-bono survey conducted by strategic market research consultancy Spire Research and Consulting in October 2014.

Spire’s survey of 300 female respondents holding executive and managerial positions in companies in China, India and Malaysia (100 per country) concentrated on the corporate aspirations of women, impediments they felt they faced and solutions they favored. The survey used a hybrid online and telephonic interviewing methodology.

98% of the women surveyed in India aspired to grow into a corporate leadership position. The comparable figure for both China (85%) and Malaysia (90%) is similar. It would appear that female executives are not comfortable with taking a back seat and want to advance professionally.

However very few women have been able to make it to the top positions in their respective organizations. This raises the question of what is slowing women down in the career space.
Of the three biggest challenges holding back these ambitions, inflexible working hours was the one that all three countries had most in common. This was followed by juggling childcare and work – a huge concern in China (85%), though a minor one in India (12%). Significant minorities (20% to 40%) cited discrimination as the third biggest impediment, with China and Malaysia recording this as far more significant than India. However in India, respondents did complain of an “old boy’s network” that held them back (38%).

Need for flexible working hours cited as a challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges/% of respondents citing this</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for flexible working hours</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining childcare and work</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination in career development</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, 45% of the respondents in Malaysia did not mention any difficulty with balancing their work-life obligations and considered their work environment healthy.

Another interesting finding was that only 12% of Indian female executives reported challenges from combining child-care and work.

Leveling the corporate playing field: What is to be done?

When it came to suggesting solutions to level the corporate playing field with men, most women highlighted flexible working hours with work-from-home options - 85% in China and 73% in Malaysia.
The next most commonly suggested solution was to have the freedom to also take a few years break from work and re-enter smoothly cited by 63% in India, 47% in Malaysia and 57% in China.

Mentorship programs for women leaders at work came third. This was highlighted as another attractive solution by respondents in China (45%) and Malaysia (51%).

Women in India offered various solutions that consisted of availability of childcare at work (26%) as well as company hotlines to report discrimination or harassment (27%). This might be an indication that women do not feel safe at their workplace or encounter compromising situations.

**Role models drive excellence**

Many women pointed to the dearth of competent women corporate leaders as a major stumbling block to success in their respective careers. With not enough female role models to look up to, women tend to underestimate their talent in contrast with men. Women in India (51%) and women in China (23%) denied having role models respectively.

Interestingly, 8% of the respondents in Malaysia looked up to family members such as mothers and sisters as role models – showing that role models need not be either famous celebrities or woman business leaders.

A minority of the women interviewed looked up to personalities such as renowned journalist Barkha Dutt (12%) and Managing Director of ICICI Bank - Chanda Kocchar (7%) in India, and Former United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton (12%) in China respectively.

**Conclusion**

The Spire study points to a gap between the ambitions that women have to be equal candidates for leadership in the corporate workplace, and the outcomes they are getting. While flexible hours and work-childcare issues
were key impediments, significant minorities report discrimination and exclusion as well. Flexible working hours are a key solution that respondents offered, followed by the ability to take breaks for a few years and mentorship programs for female executives in the workplace.

Levelling the playing field between women and men is important not only for enabling the self-realization of women but also from the standpoint of the company and society – unshackling a tremendous leadership talent pool that is currently under-utilized.

**Annex**

**Profile of respondents for China, Malaysia and India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women in Executive Roles (%)</th>
<th>Women in Junior Executive Roles (%)</th>
<th>Women in Manager/Senior Managerial Roles (%)</th>
<th>Women in Director Roles (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

**About Spire Research and Consulting**

Spire Research and Consulting is the leading research consultancy in global emerging markets. Spire's competitive advantage lies in its ability to deliver actionable intelligence on the external business environment in support of its clients’ strategic decision-making in marketing and business development. Spire's clients include 50 Global Fortune 1000 companies and government agencies in 15 countries. For more information, please visit [www.spireresearch.com](http://www.spireresearch.com).

**For media enquiries, please contact:**

Nidhi Singh
Senior Executive, Group Corporate Communications
Spire Research and Consulting
Phone:  (91) 124 646 5499
E-mail:  [nidhi.singh@spireresearch.com](mailto:nidhi.singh@spireresearch.com)