TEST
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A study on the determinants of career choices and career breaks among women professionals in the IT sector

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Abstract:
In India, the last three decades have been witness to significant changes with respect to the career trajectories amongst women. The increase in women seeking employment opportunities has been on the rise, especially post Liberalization, privatization and globalization and the IT revolution that hit India in the last decade of the last century. In this paper, an empirical study of the career choices of women workforce in Information and Technology (IT) is presented. The objectives of the study were to find out the most important reasons for the choice of career amongst women professionals, understand the association between 'parental occupation' and the 'reason for the choice of profession' among women professionals and to find out the predominant reasons for a break/s in a woman's career. The analysis of data collected through surveys resulted in thought-provoking insights into the reasons for both career choices and career breaks amongst women

I. INTRODUCTION

A study on the determinants of career choices and career breaks among women professionals in the IT sector

The Technological Revolution that impacted India in the last decade of the last century aided by Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization actually reformulated the manner in which Indians work. Following these events, the career trajectories of the Indian professionals, especially the Indian women have undergone interesting changes, as in, better and more lucrative job opportunities were created by the Technology boom. Unparalleled career opportunities were made available to aspiring Indian professionals thanks to the IT industry. This was due to some inherent advantages that Indian work environment facilitates. To name a few, a large talent pool of educated English speaking professionals who are also comparatively inexpensive, besides encouragement by the Indian Government. Besides contributing remarkably to the export earnings of the nation, the IT sector made available myriad of employment opportunities to the educated Indian youths. Undoubtedly women also got an opportunity to be trained and employed in IT, thanks to the IT revolution. Women welcomed this opportunity that was made available to them. The same is validated by the fact that 37% of the IT-BPO workforce comprises of women employees as per NASSCOM HR survey-2011.Ironically, research also shows that a remarkable percentage of women employees employed in IT attrite every year. Therefore we have a piquant situation where we have a talented pool of technically qualified women with three to four years of experience who have taken a career break. Hence the result of this is that we have a vast pool of technically qualified women professionals who are found in large numbers at the entry and middle levels but with a minimal number of them able to make it to the senior levels.In this paper, an empirical study was conducted on the career trajectories of Indian women professionals. The study attempts to understand the career journey of Indian women against the backdrop of Indian culture and cultural values besides other factors. This paper attempts to find out the reasons for career choice made by women in IT and also the challenges faced by women in the pursuit of their career.

Review of Literature

According to Gutek and Larwood (1987) career is a sequence of interrelated roles or jobs within the same organization or dissimilar jobs or roles in myriad companies. Career development refers to multiple occupations or jobs that are held by a person, and it should exemplify development or progress. There should be a raise in the salary earned or increase in the respect or level of recognition that one gets from peer group or colleagues. When there is a remarkable progress in the career of a person, then according to Gutek and Larwood such people will be construed to be effective.

Career aspirations denote the inclination or focus of an individual towards a preferred career goal line under idyllic situations or circumstances. In a nutshell, career aspirations make available the interests and hopes of an individual that is unencumbered by reality. (Hellenga, Aber, & Rhodes, 2002, p. 200; Rojewski, 1996). According to (Watson et al, 2002) the most appropriate time to decipher the career focus and

development with respect to women is adolescence as several changes take place in the course of this time which leave a profound impact on career choices , preferences and aspirations.

Factors that Influence the career aspirations amongst Women.

Khallad (2000) Watson et al, (2002) were of the opinion that factors such as socioeconomic status of the parents, the gender of the child, racial factors, the occupation pursued by the parents and their educational pursuits influence the career aspirations amongst children. Researchers examine such factors to determine their role in career behavior and how they affect individuals' career decisions (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Rojewski & Yang, 1997). Currently, there has been a sustained increase in the level of awareness with respect to the impact of factors like socioeconomic status, race, gender, and on the career development as well as the career decision process. (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

According to (Burlin, 1976) the educational background and educational level of female's parents seem to have a remarkable effect upon the career choices and career aspiration amongst women employees. According to Wahl and Blackhurst (2000), the career aspiration amongst children and young adults were impacted by the occupations pursued by their parents. This was especially so amongst adolescent females where the choice of careers made by them was greatly influenced by the occupation pursued by the mother (Burlin; Wahl & Blackhurst). This was so because children often accompanied their mothers to work and hence possessed a good understanding of the nature of their mother's work. Smilarly, Burlin (1976) inferred that career aspirations amongst women were remarkably influenced by the type of work pursued by their mothers. A study was carried out amongst college students by Burlin and the findings denoted the fact that the children of working women, especially daughters chose to emulate their mothers with respect to following the same life pattern. This finding by Burlin reiterated the importance of the part played by mothers as role models with respect to influencing the career goals and choices made by the daughters. Thus Burlin's findings echoed the significance of mothers as role models in influencing the career aspirations and career goals of their daughters. Similarly, the study carried out by Signer's and Saldana's in 2001 found that occupation pursued by the mother as compared to the father had greater influence and a stronger correlation with the daughter's career aspirations. The fact that mothers display a better presence at home reiterates the same.

According to O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005), women's careers and their lives' responsibilities recede, fade and flow in accordance with their concerns relating to the stage of life they are in. Hence all these factors need to be considered with respect to organizational models of productive and fruitful careers. This must be in addition to concerns related to work. The authors opined that women's careers could be classified into three age-related phases, namely idealistic achievement, the matter of fact or realistic endurance. While the relevant or main issues in each phase varied, women in all the three career phases were unanimously anxious about being successful-both- with respect to their personal relationship as well as their careers.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) found that as compared to men, women's career histories were relational or interpersonal in nature. They noted that for the women in their studies," career decisions were normally part of a long and intricate web of interconnected issues, people and aspects that had to come together in a dedicatedly balanced package". The authors proposed an A, B, C model of career and suggest that authenticity, balance and challenge will alternate in importance over time depending on women's career and life's circumstances.

Review regarding career breaks amongst women.

An empirical research was conducted by J. Latha and M. Sindhuja (2014) to in order to comprehend the reasons for career break amongst women professionals. The respondents for the study were IT women professionals from Chennai. This study made an attempt to trace the career path of these IT women professionals which was purportedly influenced by their culture. The study attempted to analyze the reasons for the same. The sampling method adopted was convenience sampling. The study provided an insight into the difficulties and challenges faced by these women and the remarkable levels of adjustments made by these women in pursuit of their careers. The main issues faced by these women were classified into cultural, social, structural, personal and job role-specific. These issues were major hurdles faced by these women in pursuit of their ambitions. The said paper concluded with constructive suggestions made to prospective employers to render the work environment employee (read women) friendly.

Challenges faced by the Indian Woman Professional in India

There are numerous dimensions to the Indian women, some of which are unique to her being Indian. According to the stereotype Indian mentality a woman is expected to fulfil her commitment with respect to the numerous social roles she dons. However, the fact remains that in the last three decades, especially post the LPG, the Indian society has been witness to some remarkable changes with respect to the attitude towards working Indian women. In fact, globalization and the ensuing IT boom can be credited with creating several career opportunities for women to take to professional/technical education and reasonably well-paying jobs. Studies show that as of 2010, 42% of college graduates in India were women. (Saundarya Rajesh et al-2013).

Despite the fact that the current generation shows an inclination towards nurturing career aspirations, research shows that 48% of the women who take up jobs, especially in the IT industry attrite before they reach the age of 30. Consequently we have a vast pool of educated, experienced and talented women who possess between three years to a decade of experience who may have given their career ambitions a miss and have either taken a sabbatical or a career break. . (J. Latha et al)

All this boils down to the fact that the IT industry sees an increased level of women employees at the entry-level who carry on until they reach the middle-level management. Unfortunately, there is a sparse representation of women workforce at the senior level. This trend is witnessed across sectors; however it is most rampant in IT.

When such a talented and experienced workforce abstains from pursuing their careers, it certainly does augur well for the economy as it results in loss of resources. Therefore what

needs to be done is, therefore, to contain the damage and initiate constructive action. The various challenges faced by career women in pursuit of their careers may be classified as follows:

- Cultural
- Social and Structural
- Personal
- Organizational

A brief explanation of these challenges is explained below.

Cultural challenges

As a Universal phenomenon, women and homemakers are quite synonymous. It is a given fact that the responsibility of the household eventually reposes with the woman of the house. This perception is true only with respect to any country but globally as well. This perception holds true all across Asia. Familial responsibilities are usually the prerogative of the women of the household. Especially in the Asian continent, the culture itself is such that women are primarily responsible for familial commitments and values. (Sophia Zhao). According to Yang and Kao (1988) Deo Leon and Ho (1994) in Hong Kong it is a cultural assumption that the primary role of women is to maintain the well- being and continuation of the family. The society is open to the pursuance of a career by women; however, it is also a foregone assumption that women are majorly responsible for the familial responsibility. With respect to the Hong Kong Chinese women, family responsibility is Domestic responsibility is an essential and vital part of her upbringing. Consequently, irrespective of gaining significant stature on the professional front, marriage and motherhood continue to assume a vital position for Hong Kong Chinese women according to Deo Leon and Ho (1994).

Social and structural challenges:

With respect to the social status of an Indian Woman, she essentially lacks an individual status. She is either a daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law besides being an employee. With respect to the individual front, a woman experiences several life events like wedlock, issues relating to marriage, beliefs of career women in the family that she is married to, events relating to relocation of spouse, pregnancy, childbirth, sometimes unfortunate events like sickness of self of that of an elder in the family. Under these circumstances, if she does not have a support system to fall back upon, which is quite a norm rather than an exception, she has to bear the brunt of the circumstances and take a career break rather than the male member of the family.

In the Asian continent, more particularly in India it is a well-documented fact that tens of millions of women take prolonged breaks from their respective jobs for various life events. According to a study conducted by the World Bank which was conducted in association with National sample survey organization 20 million women in India quit their jobs between the years 2004 and 2012. A vast majority of them, i.e. almost 65 to 70 % never returned to work after the break. Though a large number of women join the workforce at the lower levels, there is a marked decline in the number of career women as they climb the corporate ladder. In fact women make up over 50% of all the entry level positions. However there is a visible downward trend with respect to the number of women who participate in the workforce as they climb the

career ladder. As they approach the C-Suite level, a meagre 15% of the global businesses have women at the CEO or Managing Director's level. This is as per the 2019 Grant Thornton report (Hasnan, 2019), 'Women in Business.'

According to this report, women professionals who served in senior management positions in countries like the Philippines was at a decent 47percent. However women representation at the C-suite level plummeted to a meagre 3 percent. This was revealed in the year 2018 in a report by McKinsey in 'The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific – Focus: Philippines

One of the predominant reasons for a career break amongst women is childbirth. A woman often experiences a sense of guilt when she bears a child and is unable to tend to it. This bond gradually transforms into responsibility and eventually forms one of the predominant reasons for women professionals to take a career break.

It is a known fact that women face problems plainly by virtue of their being women. When a woman enters a new home post marriage, in the patriarchal society, she is expected to endear herself to the new home and family. In orthodox Indian society, she could not be seen having an independent streak and embarking on her career journey right away. However, now the Indian society is more tolerant of the idea of a working Indian woman. That is perhaps the reason why issues relating to the relocation of the spouse ranks second in the reasons for a career break amongst women. Other important reasons like elder care, illness of self are other reasons that compel women to take a career break.

Research Questions

Which are the most important reasons for the choice of career for a woman?

Are the occupations of the parents associated with the reasons for the choice of profession for a woman?

What are the predominant reasons for a break(s) in a woman's career?

Objectives of the study

To find the most important reasons for the choice of career for women

To find if the occupation of parents are associated with the reasons for the choice of profession for a woman

To find the major reasons for a break in a woman's career

Hypotheses:

H1: The occupation of the father influences the reasons for the choice of profession for a woman.

H2: The occupation of the mother influences the reasons for the choice of profession for a woman

Methodology

Study design: This is a combination of descriptive and inferential research.

Sampling Unit: Woman IT Professional (operationally defined as a woman with a college education gainfully employed in the IT sector) in Bangalore

Population size: According to the 2011 census conducted by the Government of India available from

http://www.censusindia.gov.in/ the total population of Bangalore is 9,621,551of whom females are 4,598,890. The number of literate females is 3,434,235 and the number of working females is 1,131,566. Since the census does enumerate professional women explicitly, it can safely be assumed that the number of women professionals cannot exceed 1,131,566.

Sampling Method: Responses were solicited both offline and online. Offline respondents for the study were selected on the basis of a simple random sampling method, while online respondents were selected on convenience sampling followed by snowball sampling methods.

Sample Size: A sample size of between 30 and 500 is suitable for most social research (Sekaran, 2003). Responses from 194 women professionals were found to be useful for analysis.

*Mode of data collection***:** The research instrument used is a questionnaire which was constructed after thorough research into all the variables identified in the objectives of the study.

Variables and measures: In this study, the variable 'occupation of the father' is measured on a categorical scale 'Self-employed/Employed', the variable 'occupation of mother' is also measured on a categorical scale ' Career woman/Homemaker'. Reasons for choosing a career ('To earn a livelihood', 'Childhood aspiration', Parental advice', 'Influence of peers/friends', "In-demand job', and 'others') are all on ordinal (ranking) scale

Data analysis and results

To find the most important reasons for choosing a career, the descriptives of the reasons were analysed. The most important reason is the 'In-Demand Job'' other than the ones combined as 'Others' as seen in Table 1

Table - I : Reasons for choosing a career

Descriptive Statistics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Earn a livelihood	194	1	6	2.36	1.645
Childhood aspiration	194	1	6	2.56	1.587
Parental Advice	193	1	6	3.32	1.436
Influence of Friends/ Peers	194	1	6	3.80	1.364
In-Demand Job	194	1	6	3.87	1.506
Others	194	1	6	4.54	1.942
Valid N (listwise)	193				

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'To earn a living" between the occupations of the father. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Self Employed' and 'Employed' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Self-employed (2) and Employed (2) were not statistically significantly different, U = 4335.5, z = -.734, p = .463

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Childhood aspiration" between the occupations of the father. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Self Employed' and 'Employed' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Self-employed (2) and Employed (2) were not statistically significantly different, U = 5228.5,z = 1.68, p =. 093 z = -.734, p = .463.

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Parental Advice" between the occupations of the father. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Self Employed' and 'Employed' were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Reason importance scores for Self-employed (Mean rank=106.12) and Employed (Mean Rank=85.60) were statistically significantly different, U = 5485.00, z = 2.489, p = .013

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Influence of Friends and peers" between the occupations of the father. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Self Employed' and 'Employed' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Self-employed (4) and Employed (4) were not statistically significantly different, U = 4649.0, z = .121, p = .903

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Median

Table - II : Median Values

Mother is/was a career mom	Earn a livelihood	Childhood aspiration	Parental Advice	Influence of Friends / Peers	In-Demand Job	Others
.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	6.00
1.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	6.00
Total	2.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	6.00

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'To earn a living' between the occupations of the mother. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Mom is/was a career woman' and 'Mom is a homemaker' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Career Woman (2) and Home

Maker (2) were not statistically significantly different, U = 4335.5, z = -.734, p = .463

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Childhood aspiration" between the occupations of the mother. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Mom is/was a career woman' and 'Mom is a homemaker' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Career Woman (2) and Home

Maker (2) were not statistically significantly different, U = 2987.5, z = -.492, p = .622

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Parental Advice" between the occupations of the mother. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Mom is/was a career woman' and 'Mom is a homemaker' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Career Woman (3) and Home

Maker (3) were not statistically significantly different, U = 2947.00, z = .994, p = .608

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Influence of Friends and peers' between the occupations of the mother. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Mom is/was a career woman' and 'Mom is a homemaker' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Career Woman (4) and Home

Maker (4) were not statistically significantly different, U = 2879.0, z = -.828, p = .408

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'In demand Job" between the occupations of the mother. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Mom is/was a career woman' and 'Mom is a homemaker' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Career Woman (4) and Home (Chakraborthy, 2018) (Chakraborthy, 2018)

Maker (4) were not statistically significantly different, U = 2705.0, z = -1.382, p = .167

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the rankings of the reason 'Others' between the occupations of the mother. Distributions of the importance rankings for 'Mom is/was a career woman' and 'Mom is a homemaker' were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Median importance scores for Career Woman (6) and Home Maker (6) were not statistically significantly different, U = 2897.5, z = -.830, p = .406

To understand the reasons for career breaks among women the responses were analysed as summarized in Table III.

Table - III : Reasons for Career breaks

Reason for career break	Yes	No	N	Yes (%)	No (%)
Marriage and related issues	90	104	194	46.39	53.61
Maternity and childcare	74	120	194	38.14	61.86
Lack of Job satisfaction	64	130	194	32.99	67.01
Lack of work-life balance	59	135	194	30.41	69.59
Relocation of spouse	47	147	194	24.23	75.77
Illness of self/family members	32	162	194	16.49	83.51
Strange/ unexpected event	30	164	194	15.46	84.54
Hostile working environment	21	173	194	10.82	89.18
Sabbatical availed for higher education	17	177	194	8.76	91.24
Inappropriate career choice	14	180	194	7.22	92.78
My child's / children's education	13	181	194	6.70	93.30
Death of a loved one	10	184	194	5.15	94.85

Discussion of results

In so far as the results from the study are concerned the following observations are remarkable:

This study tried to draw a connection between the occupations of the father with the reason for the career choice made by the woman professional. It noted that where the father was employed in any organization, private or government, the advice given by the father was valued and followed in making a career choice. This scored well over the advice given by the self-employed father.

In spite of Literature review which validated the connection between mother's occupation and the reason for the choice of occupation amongst daughters, the study did not reiterate the same. A majority of the respondents' mothers were housewives.

On a survey regarding the reason for career choice amongst women professionals, the majority of the women chose the IT profession as it was an In-demand profession at the time they decided to go in for it.

This study made an attempt to understand the reasons for career breaks amongst women professionals. Amongst others, marriage and related issues were found to be the predominant reasons for career break amongst women professionals. Nearly 46 per cent of the respondents took a career break because of the aforementioned reason. This was followed by maternity and childcare as the second most important reason for women professionals to take a career break (38%).

Managerial Implications and Conclusion

There is absolutely no denying the fact that Indian women have bypassed stereotypes and made a remarkable leap in their respective careers. The fact remains that the generation of women who were employable in the 1990's , post the IT revolution era and the LPG era have been one of the main beneficiaries of the IT boom. The empirical study carried out by this paper examines the reasons for the career choices of women professionals and the challenges faced by such women in the pursuit of their career. Many factors were identified like-Cultural, Social, structural, personal which tend to digress women from pursuing their respective careers. Identifying the pitfalls can be of immense value as women in similar conditions can take proactive measures to overcome the same. In the study conducted, one of the major causes of career break amongst women was marriage and related issues. Relocation of spouse figured amongst one of the remarkable reasons for career breaks amongst women. However, the most important reasons impacting majority of the women respondents was maternity and child care issues. Women were either unable to find suitable support system to take care of their child or were unable to trust the support system to take care of their precious child. So much for the cultural mindset of the women, who perceived domestic responsibility to be their chief concern.

Since talent retention is also an equally important challenge faced by organizations in contemporary times, IT companies could introduce certain measures like part time work which may allow work life balance for these professionals. Part time work is attractive for both - the employees have a better hold of their lives while the organization benefits from reduced pay. Other options like work from home drastically reduce travel time especially in cities which are notorious for their traffic. Options like flexi timings, teleconferencing and extensive use of digitization to render the lives of working women more comfortable provide an opportunity for these talented women to pursue their careers and chase their dreams.

A conclusion with the remarks of Sheryl Sandberg from Lean in is apt under the circumstances. Sandberg said that the underlying truth remains that men continue to dominate at the workplace and consequently with respect to decision-making women's voices are subdued. In fact Warren Buffet once famously said that one of the reasons for his success was he was vying with only half the population. She said that men of all generations continue to enjoy the same advantage. What is amazing is the fact that at the entry level, a large number of women form the majority of the workforce; however with every level, the number of women continues to ebb and eventually, the leadership roles are assumed primarily by men. The solution in the prevailing situation would be to encourage female leadership.

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