

Factors Influencing Career Aspirations and Challenges Faced in Their Pursuit – A Study on Indian Women IT Professionals

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Abstract:

The woman work force has become increasingly involved post World War II. With respect to women employment, the last hundred years have witnessed the shift in traditional women-oriented roles to previously held male oriented ones. Undoubtedly there has been a spurt in women's participation in the labor force and this in turn has led to focused study on career aspirations of women. Career aspirations are the fundamental building blocks for any successful career of a working professional. They are shaped in the formative years before employment and undergo transformation when the individual goes into employment. In the pursuit of their career aspirations, working women professionals often experience myriad challenges.

This study attempts to examine and rank the factors influencing career aspirations as well as classify the different phases of career aspirations into three broad categories. These are Formative phase, Transformative- Phase-I & II and Matured phase. The study uses snowball sampling and convenience sampling method and the sample size is 414 women from the domain of IT, ITES and BPO. The study classifies the challenges faced by working women professionals into sociocultural, structural, and personal.

Garrett ranking method has been used in the study to rank the reasons for career aspirations. The study has successfully developed a model on literature reviews.

Keywords: Career aspirations, working women professionals, challenges

Introduction:

In the last three decades, the career paths of the Indian women workforce have undergone remarkable transformations as a result of lucrative job opportunities that the technology boom created. Furthermore, there is a natural advantage of a 12-hour time gap with the American continent. Indian women had access to technical education in large numbers and made good of the opportunities. This is validated by the fact that 34% of the IT, BPO and ITES work force is comprised of women. The dismal part, however, is that a whopping 48% of these women employees attrite every year before they reach 30 years of age. As a result, a huge talent pool of women with 3 to around 10 years of tech experience is created due to this attrition. Though we have a large pool of women at the entry levels, their numbers halve by the time they reach middle management positions and by the time they reach senior management position, they are just a trickle. An analysis of career aspirations and the challenges faced by these IT women professionals is the key to understand the attrition phenomenon.

Main Content:

The term career aspiration refers to a long-term career goal, a plan or perhaps a dream that may be far away in respect of time and not a short-term goal. In brief, an aspiration talks about a "hope" or an "ambition."

The relevance of career aspirations of employees lies in the fact that when an employee indulges in a passion, there is no issue relating to burn-out or saturation of such employees.

According to Powell & Butterfield [2003], the term career aspiration refers to the desire that an individual harbors for future employment. Farmer & Chung [1995] opined that it represents the dreams that individuals have regarding an ideal occupation. In fact, Farmer [1985] opined that career aspirations are capable of influencing both - a person's achievement as well as persistence in the career.

An attempt was therefore made to find out the reason thereof, their career goals as well the factors that shaped their career aspirations. According to Literature review, the career aspirations are shaped at a very young age by factors like race, gender, parental education, parental occupations and their expectations, their socioeconomic status and educational background of the women employees. Osipow & Fitzgerald [1996]; Rojewski & Yang [1997], Stitt-Gohdes [1997], Looft [1971], Mendez & Crawford [2002]; Wahl & Blackhurst [2000], Hellenga et al. [2002], Burlin [1976], Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, [2005]. These are classified as the Formative phase in the present study. This is because the formative years play an important role in shaping the career aspirations of women employees.

In the Transformative- Phase-I as identified in the study, once such women enter their respective occupations, their career aspirations are shaped by factors like their self-efficacy or self-effectiveness, role of work-life conflict, gender role attitude, social support and role model. Hackett and Betz [1981], Lent et al. [1996], Bandura's [1977, 1986], Lent et al. [1994], Flores & O'Brien [2002]; Nauta et al., [1998]; Nauta & Epperson [2003], Wu Hwei Ming [2017]. In this phase, the women professionals face challenges that are typically associated with their professions as well as their person. As time moves on these women enter the Transformative phase-II wherein the challenges, in addition to the existing professional's ones add up with those in the personal space and render it hard to manage. The challenges have been classified as sociocultural, structural and organizational and personal.

Unable to manage the burden and strike a work life balance career break is a natural outcome.

Challenges faced by women professionals:

In India it was presumed that economic activities were primarily the prerogatives of men while domestic chores, procreation and upkeep of the family rested with the womenfolk. However, with increased access to technical education particularly after the LPG in the 1990's along with increased cost of living, women folk are seen to be venturing out in search of employment and careers. The irony however is that women join the workforce, especially the IT workforce in large numbers, but a large number of them are unable to sustain their careers due to challenges that they face in the pursuit of their careers. The reasons for their career breaks are rather common and familiar-marriage, sometimes relocation of the spouse, pregnancy, child-birth, child rearing, unfair share of domestic work, health issues relating to self or elders in the family and the like. Indian working women constitute 20.04% of the workforce. An abysmal 5 percent of these reach manage to reach the top layer, compared to a global average of 20 percent. The challenges faced by the working professionals have been classified for the purpose of this study as structural, organizational and personal. The good thing however, is that for every barrier, there is hopefully a solution. This paper attempts to devise a model which proposes workable solutions to the barriers faced by working women

professionals.

Literature review:

Career Aspirations:

Prakash & Nagabhushanam, [2018]: This study explored the career aspirations of employees in IT sector. The study concludes on the note that an internal push matters more than an external pull to ensure career success for employees in the IT sector.

Mahapatra. M [2018]: This paper focuses on achievement motivation and attitude of women academicians, especially those in higher learning. It also focuses on their motivation for growth, the barriers they encounter and the approach they apply to resolve conflict and move towards meeting their career aspirations.

Rumman & Khan, [2019]: The study analyzed the association between career aspiration and positive career behavior in the Indian scenario. It was found that greater career aspiration influences employees to display enhanced proactivity to achieve their career objectives.

Suvarna J. et al [2019]: In this paper, a field survey was carried out to assess career aspirations and choices made by female students in the Hyderabad- Karnataka region. It concluded by calling upon both teachers and parents to consider the skill sets of their wards before suggesting suitable career options to them.

Challenges:

Dr. Garima Mathur [2018]: This paper examines the various factors that contribute to discriminatory practices faced by women. Gender discrimination exists in various domains of management that includes salaries, promotion, decision making, participation etc.

Report from Lean In and McKinsey & Company [2018]: There is a greater chance of women

dealing with micro aggression. They are constantly on their guard; they are under pressure

to perform and they feel left out. They face sexual harassment at work place. Due the multiple challenges faced by them, they also leave their jobs in large numbers.

Radhika Kapur [2018]: The intense level of commitment that women professionals show towards their family hinders their career growth. Some of the recommendations in this paper include counselling and guidance, approachable attitude of managers and leaders, providing a congenial work atmosphere, managing work life balance and the like.

Nakra. M & Sreenivasan.V [2011]: They conducted a survey on the working women professionals in the Indian IT industry with respect to "The leaky bucket of female talent in the Indian I.T.". According to this study, certain social, structural and self-related factors posed hindrances to women's progress in the IT sector.

NASSCOM [2014]: According to this report, during the 1980's barely 5-8 % female engineering graduates were a part of the IT industry. There was a dramatic increase in this statistic to 30-35% in 2014.

Thanavathi [2018]: At the time when India attained her independence, majority of the women were not literates. Despite that they involved themselves in striving for goals including gender equality with respect to job opportunities and amendment of existing laws and reformation of society based on physical, intellectual and emotional wellness

Research methodology:

This study adopted the survey method [quantitative study].

Based on literature review and pre-survey discussions with sample respondents, the questionnaire was administered to over 500 working women professionals in IT, ITES and BPO[Bangalore].

Snow ball sampling and convenience sampling methods were used to identify respondents. 414 usable responses [100 through personal/ telephonic interactions] and the remaining through Google forms were received.

Data was tabulated with the use of MS EXCEL and SPSS software. The statistical tools included the following:

- Garret Ranking method
- Percentage and mean calculations.

Findings:

The factors influencing career aspirations were analysed and the findings are as under:

Ranks	Earn a livelihood	Childhood aspiration	Parental advice	Influence of friends/ peers	Better job opportunities	Others
RANK-1	212	77	54	24	34	10
RANK-2	72	164	66	46	58	7
RANK-3	47	70	154	69	65	8
RANK-4	39	39	87	174	74	5
RANK-5	31	55	46	94	172	13
RANK-6	13	9	7	7	11	371

Garret score and their corresponding ranks

Factor	Average Scores	Rank
Earn a livelihood	64.25	1
Childhood aspiration	58.06	2
Parental advice	54.13	3
Influence of friends/ peers	48.17	4
Better job opportunities	47.65	5
Others	26.29	6

Analysis of challenge faced by working women professionals- Personal Factors

SI No	Personal Factors	Responses		Rank
		Number	Percentage	
1.	Health Issues	268	74.4	1
2.	Strange unexpected event	173	48.1	2
3.	Break to pursue higher studies	143	39.7	3
4.	Inappropriate career choice	129	35.8	4
5.	Child's/ Childrens' education	87	24.2	5
6.	Death of a loved one	16	04.4	6
6	Working during night shift	311	75.9	6
7	Poor Day care facility	280	68.3	7
8	Lack of support system - child care	268	65.4	8
9	Workplace harassment	263	64.1	9

Table 2 shows the calculation of garrets ranking scores and the final ranks based on averagescore.

Analysis of challenge faced by working women professionals- Sociocultural factors

SI No	Sociocultural factors	Responses		Rank
		Number	Percentage	
1.	Prioritization of Family Life	346	89.6	1
2.	Career break post child birth	304	78.8	2
3.	Inability to strike work life balance	281	72.8	3
4.	Career break post marriage	232	60.1	4
5.	Career Break due to spouse's relocation	205	53.1	5
6.	Quit due to ill-health of elder in family	197	51.0	6
7.	Career Break due to pregnancy	147	38.1	7

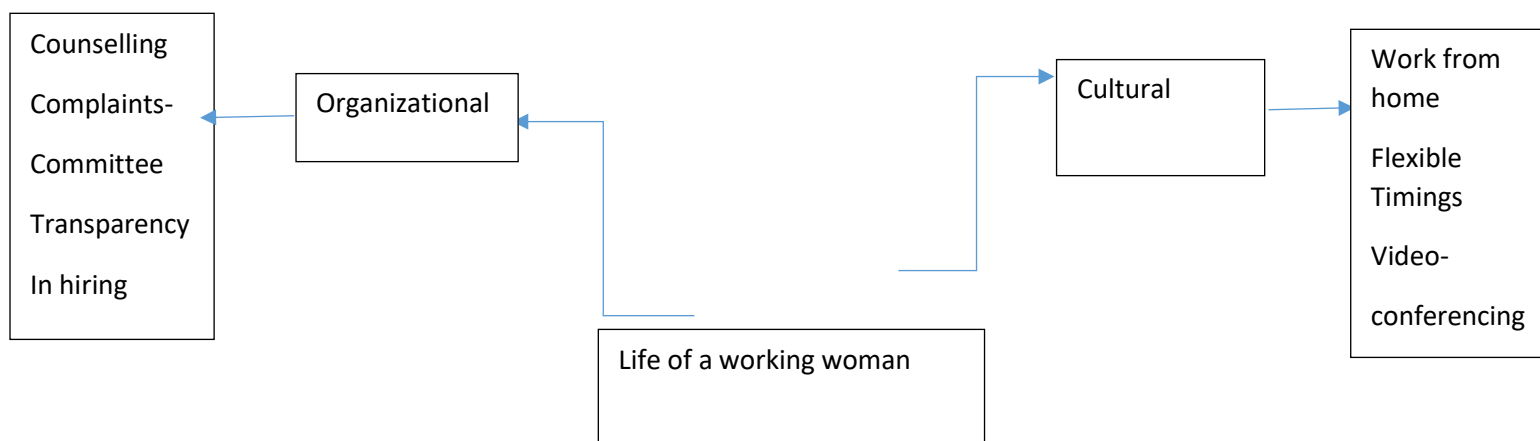
Implications:

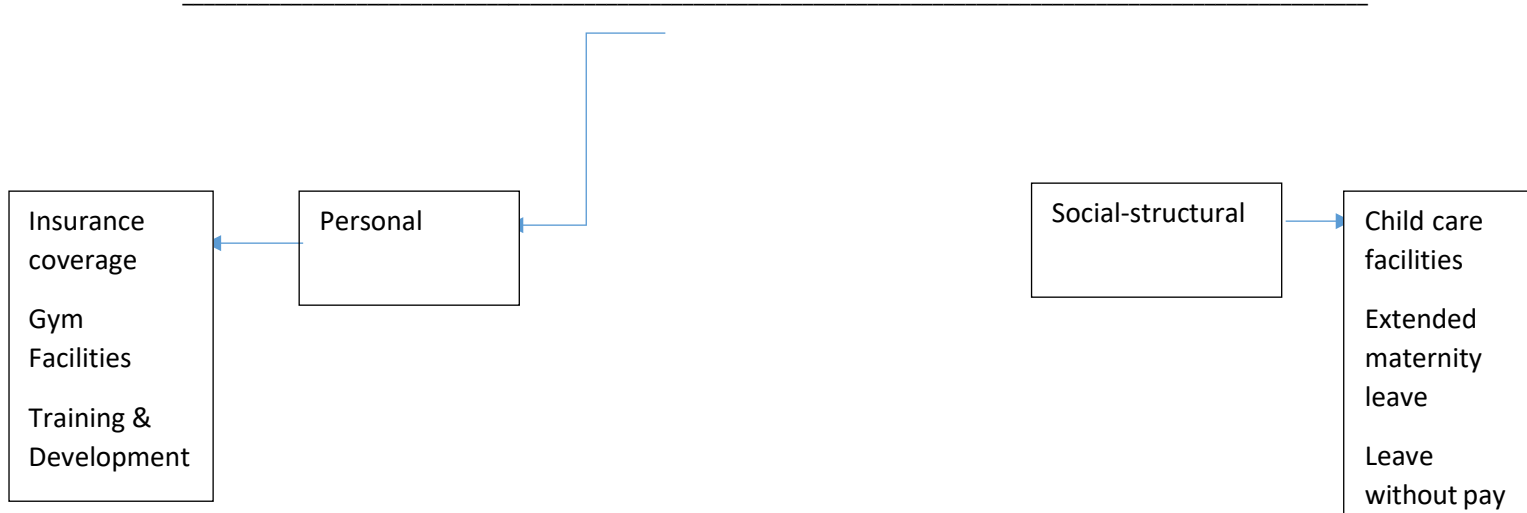
Career aspirations transform from the conscious childhood phase to the retirement phase and undergoes constant changes, revisions and amendments based on experiences, challenges and life events. The importance of career aspirations in determining success is seen in the case of Indra Nooyi (of Indian origin and erstwhile Chairman and CEO of PepsiCo between 2006- 2019 and presently a member of the board of Amazon and a part of the Audit Committee) who was groomed into a leadership role by her mother who encouraged her two daughters to think and dream big. Every night, Indra's mother would ask her daughters to give speeches. In fact the girls were asked to render a speech like the leader of a nation or the head of a state. Dr. Swati Mohan [Indian-American aerospace engineer who was the Guidance and Controls Operations Lead on the NASA Mars 2020 mission], on the other hand was hugely motivated by Star war movies as a nine year old girl and took a liking towards physics, Mechanical Engineering and Aeronautical Engineering during her formative phase.

The importance of the study on career aspirations cannot be overemphasized. It is during the formative phase that youngsters aspire to achieve their career goals. Parents and Teachers can be a hugely motivating factor in refining the career aspirations of youngsters. Their role is pivotal to ensure that their aspirations are not unrealistic. This study emphasizes the systematic institutionalization of grooming and facilitating the formation of setting challenging yet realistic career aspirations which can bring out the hidden potential of young people in shaping their career and in realizing their optimum potential.

Moreover, the challenges faced by Indian working women professionals and the impact it has on the pursuit of their careers have been addressed in the Literature review as well as in the data analysis. Furthermore, the researcher has come up with a model to ameliorate and suggest remedies to the barriers faced by women professionals in the pursuit of their careers in the IT domain.

The model is as given below.

Model developed as a solution to the challenges faced by working women professionals:



This model was developed by the researcher as a possible solution to overcome the challenges that women in IT face in the pursuit of their career. Each of the challenges faced may be overcome with solutions as described in the model

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