



INDIAN WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Vedangi Hiren Thakkar* Navika Vishal Sharma**

*SY-BBA, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies Mumbai, V. L, Pherozeshah Mehta Rd, Vile Parle, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

**SY-BBA, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies Mumbai, V. L, Pherozeshah Mehta Rd, Vile Parle, Mumbai, Maharashtra India.

Abstract

India is a land of diverse cultures and customs. Women have been an essential asset of the economy. The study aims to understand the experiences of Indian women in workforce. It puts light on the factors that lead to increased female participation and the benefits and challenges of the workplace. These factors stem right from recruitment till the factors that drive them to exit from the workforce. It also evaluates re-entry of women in the workforce. For the purpose of the research, 151 respondents that were working women in the urban areas of Mumbai were asked to fill a structured questionnaire. Various research papers and reports were referred as secondary data to comprehend the existing level of research. Results of the study show challenges such as lack of equal wages, family pressure and sexual harassment. The need for security systems, child care facilities, and consultants support female participation in the workplace.

Keywords: Working Women, Urban Area, Challenges, Workplace Environment, Work-Life Balance.

Introduction

Women are a basic element of the society, they form an integral part of the home, family and country. The status of women in India has gone through vast changes over the past years. Men and women are expected to behave in a specific way in the society. This is referred to as gender stereotyping. It limits men and women's capacity to develop their personal abilities or pursue the career of their liking. Traditionally, while men act as the bread winner, women are to be the homemakers of the household. Gender stereotyping and organizational culture are the two prominent aspects that contribute to discrimination between men and women in the workforce. The gender bias is perceived to be originating right from the first interaction of women with the organizations, i.e. the recruitment process. The challenges come full circle and at times the pressure of social norms in workplace pushes women to leave organizations. Though inequalities still exist in our society there has been gradual shift in the women's experience with the workforce. On the organizational front, women provide different perspectives, enhance collaborations and promote a positive image of the company to all its stakeholders. They aim for a work-life balance and perform dual roles of being the homemaker as well as a working female. The contribution of women is vital to organizational growth despite the challenges in the work culture. The urban working woman is aware of her right to individual development and plays her role in the workforce aptly. The changing mentality of people pushes organizations to gradually move towards a more diverse composition of human resources in terms of gender.

Literature Review

(Yousaf, Humayon, Rasheed, Ahmed, & Danish, 2014) in this research aims to understand the various factors that affect the workforce entry decisions of females. Primary data was collected by conducting a survey among females from different backgrounds. The impact of family pressure and social issues is large and often affects productivity level of the employees. Facilities such as child care centers, transportation are to be provided to all female employees.

(Gupta, 2015) in the research paper titled Problems and Challenges faced by Urban Working Women in India with reference to Bihar aims to understand the challenges to urban working women, key socio-economic factors contributing to women's status, security, community and society's overall development, as solutions that could help overcome the challenges in workforce.



(Zabir, Mozahid, Bhuiyan, Lima, & Tasnim, 2018) in the following research paper aims to understand the factors leading to job satisfaction among female employees. The study collected primary data of women in various fields. Emergency leave, maternity leave, equal workload, pay and benefits, communication with co-workers and supervisors are identified as the most critical factors leading to job satisfaction.

(Praveen & Shahid, 2016) in this research aims to identify role of organizational security to find out how it affects the performance of employees. Primary data is collected in the form of questionnaire. It identifies that there is a lack of protection from harassment and employer concern for safety and security. A systematic and proper implementation of a security system to be in place at the organization.

Research Design

This research has focused on descriptive research. Descriptive research is a structured approach whereby primary data is collected through quantitative method of survey. The following is a single cross-sectional study whereby data was collected from the sample groups that represent the population and was taken once at a particular period of time.

The following research used quantitative data method which is numerical in nature and structured questions were asked to the respondents. The data collection method used was survey. Further, online questionnaire had been circulated to get data from the sample population.

Further, the following research studies the women in Mumbai who are currently a part of the workforce and the sample size was of 151 respondents.

For this research non-probability sampling method was used where the units in the population do not have a known chance of being selected as a sample. Further, convenience sampling was used i.e. the respondents were selected as per the researcher’s convenience.

Research Problem

The research problem of this paper was to understand the experiences of Indian women in workforce, primarily among the working women in Mumbai.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the basic reasons behind women joining the workforce.
2. To understand the most frequently encountered challenges by women in workforce.
3. To analyze the factors that lead to job satisfaction among women employees.
4. To identify the impact of challenges on mental health, safety and security of female employees.
5. To understand the circumstances and process of re-entry of women into workforce.

Results

To identify the basic reasons behind women joining the workforce.

Today, women aim for equal opportunities, skill development, economic independence, social recognition in the workforce. It is essential to understand the factors that affect the decision of women to enter the workforce.

Table 1.1 : Factors determining the decision to enter the workforce

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Source of household income	66	43.7086093
Family pressure	23	4.46601942
Reduce Dependency	55	36.4238411

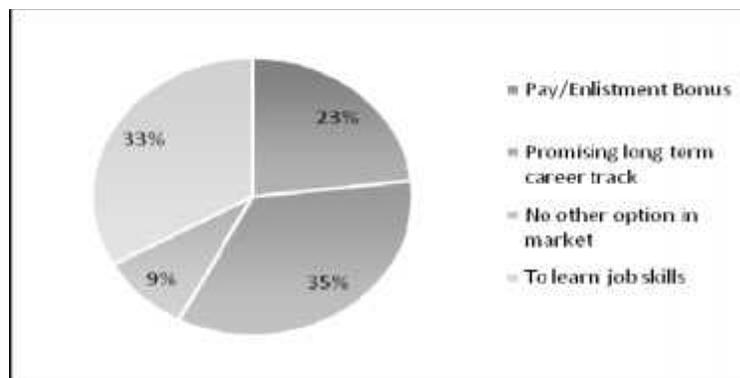
Utilize potential	68	45.0331126
Societal Recognition	42	27.8145695

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.1 identifies the major determinants of entry of women in the workforce. These include utilizing one's potential (45.03 per cent) followed by women acting as a source of household income (43.71 per cent). The figures show that rather than having to work due to family pressure (4.46 per cent) or social reasons (27 per cent) the women chose to work more towards reducing dependency, utilizing their skills and acting as a source of income for their household.

The research aimed to comprehend whether the current job opportunity was taken voluntarily, out of need for a job, income incentive or for development as an individual and whether their demand is met by an equal supply in their field/occupation of choice. Out of 151 respondents, more than 50 per cent of the women voluntarily chose to work in this field/occupation while, 36.42 per cent of the women wanted to join the work but couldn't join their first priority of occupation. This mode of the data (at 77 respondents) represents that women are actively looking for job opportunities and carry higher ambition to work at the place of their choice.

Chart 1.1: Reasons for Choosing Occupation/Field



Source: Primary Data

The chart 1.1 explains the reasons why women chose to work in a particular occupation or field. Median of the data depicts the reason behind staying in the occupation as the promise of a long-term career (35 per cent). Along with that, 33 per cent of the respondents felt motivated to stay in their occupation so as to acquire the job skills. While the job maybe long term and stable, it also ensured that the end result of their journey in the workforce would result in overall growth of their skill set as well as their development as an individual.

Table 1.2: Perception of women about Organizational culture

Particulars	Average	Standard Deviation
My organization tends to make assumptions about people's capabilities based on their gender, age and other stereotypes.	2.92	1.20
My commitment to this organization would be questioned if I chose flexible work option.	2.99	1.27
My organization is open to promoting female leaders to a senior level.	3.33	1.12
I feel valued as a female working in this organization	3.56	1.07

Source: Primary Data

When an employee joins the organization, the values and work culture promoted by the organization is analyzed. Organizations tend to have certain preconceived notions of women’s working style, communication and outcomes. While progressing the women are restricted by the glass ceiling which means that females aren’t given an equal opportunity to move to higher levels in an organization. The respondents in the survey portray a neutral point when it comes to how the organizations makes assumptions about people, female leadership representation and valuing females in an organization. Hence, the progress of accepting females as equal to men is slow but gradual.

To understand the most frequently encountered challenges by women in workforce.

Table: 1.3 Challenges faced in the Workforce

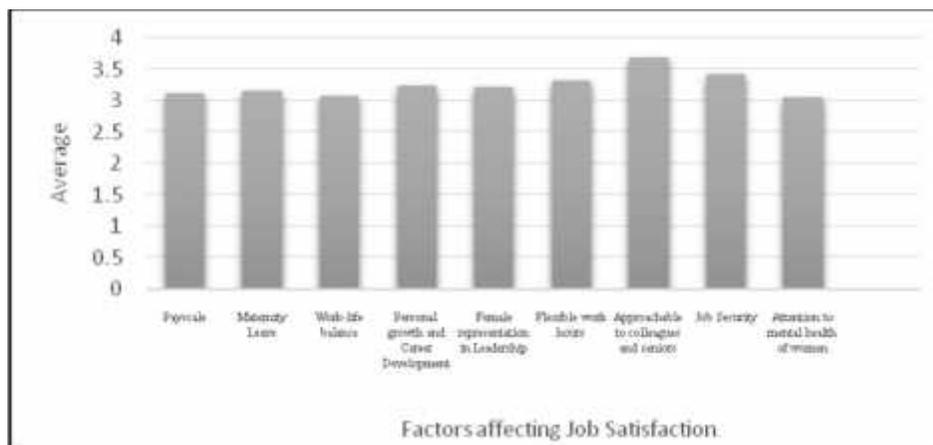
Particulars	Percentage
Equal Pay	39.73
Mental Harassment	15.23
Sexual Harassment	11.25
Family Barriers	25.16
Work-life balance	42.38
Challenges as a working mother	28.47
Job Security	32.45
Career Opportunities	29.80
Ineffective training and development programs	21.85
Gender Bias	25.82

Source: Primary Data

The respondents state that the highly dissatisfying factor identified as a challenge is the work-life balance (42 per cent) and lack of equal pay (39 per cent). Even though organizations promote their belief in fair pay, in reality the females are paid much less than what is paid to their male colleagues, despite being at the same level of qualification, experience and position in workforce. The role of women in families is very essential and they struggle to strike a balance between their family and professional life. Various other factors identified were job security, career opportunities, challenges of a working mother, mental and sexual harassment.

To analyze the factors that lead to job satisfaction among women employees.

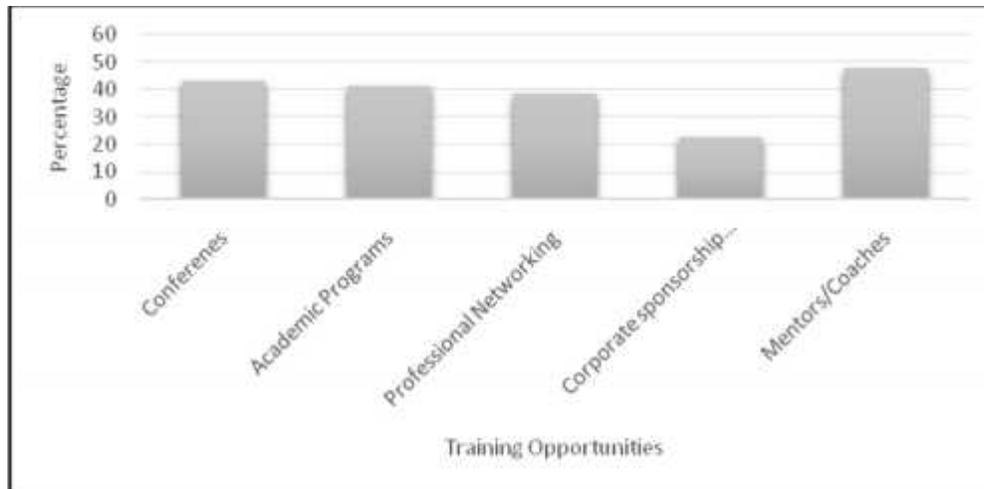
Chart 1.2: Factors affecting Job Satisfaction of Women in Workforce



Source: Primary Data

Like every coin has two sides, there are various aspects that act as challenges whereas others lead to job satisfaction of women in organizations. One of the benefits that the respondents related to job satisfaction was the support that they receive from their colleagues as well as superiors. This helped them in facing challenges as well as keep them motivated, ensuring that they perform effectively. In the following table respondents were asked to rate the aspects on a scale of one to five, (One -Highly dissatisfied, Five- Highly satisfied). On an average job security was rated at 3.4. This corresponds with women's need to search for a promising and long-term career track. Various other factors such as flexible work hours, personal growth and female representation in leadership roles act as motivating factors in the workplace.

Chart 1.3: Training opportunities provided to Women in Workforce



Source: Primary Data

The following chart represents the various training opportunities provided to female employees. It represents that a large segment of the respondents received training in the form of mentoring, conferences and academic programs. Other than that professional networking (38 per cent) and corporate leadership training (22 per cent) were also used to train them in organizations.

The median of the data found was providing academic access to the women in the workforce.

Almost equal number of respondents that believe that women have fewer/ same opportunities as men in the workforce. Only a meager 13 per cent of total respondents believe that the women will have more opportunities than men when participating in the workforce.

To understand the role played by females in taking financial decisions in their households. The survey results showed that a greater amount (39 per cent) of women take budgeting and day-to-day financing decisions alongside their partners while 31 per cent enjoy autonomy of financial decision making. It can be understood that women seek for financial independence and aim to have control of their decisions as well as where their finances are being invested for the future. This is a positive aspect as it helps understand that there is a higher degree of control and acceptance among individuals to ensure equality in decision making.

The women's decision to work in the organization also depends on its impact on their physical and mental health security. The impact of challenges faced in the workforce by women can have a negative impact on their mental and physical health. The negative impact of these challenges adversely leads to poor performance and lack of progress of the female employees. The respondents believed that it is essential to have support of male colleagues to ensure a positive work environment, this means that women look for a more integrated and accepting work culture whereby they get the right support to fight challenges in workforce. The weight of social expectations has a heavy impact on mental status of women as it controls how they are expected to behave and work which further creates stress.

To understand the circumstances and process of re-entry of women into workforce.

Table 1.4 Reasons for Exit from Workforce

Particular	Respondents	Percentage
Workplace Challenges	62	41.05
Family pressure	55	36.42
Parental Leave	47	31.12
Further Education	39	25.82
Alternative career options	60	39.73

Source: Primary Data

Re-entry refers to the process whereby an employee leaves the workforce for a particular period of time and then re-enters. Before understanding the process of re-entry of women in workforce, the research identified the reasons why women chose to leave the workforce in the first place. The mode of the following data collected depicts that women leave the workforce due to the challenges faced in relation to it. This implies that the organizations aren't effectively able to retain the female workers and hence there is a high burnout due to the challenges faced in the workplace. A positive aspect is that the respondents claimed that women tend to leave to look at alternate career options which can contribute more to their overall development. The median stands as the family pressure that women face while working.

The decision of re-entry is guided by financial reasons like expenses and an additional source of income. But, only a few women i.e. 17.22 per cent of the respondents claimed to be doing so to utilize their potential. Women tend to join the workforce to reduce dependency and meet expenses but not due to their skills and potential to work. One of the difficulties faced during re-entry is the employment opportunities. More than half of the respondents claimed that the lack of employment opportunities from the organization front to be a hurdle to get appropriate jobs. But, they also struggle in the workplace due to lack of up-to date skills. This implies that during the period of absence, the workforce structure and development of the organization's requirements are ever-changing for the women to cope up with. Other factors identified are loss of clarity, difficulty in working as a mother and age discrimination. The respondents identified that they had an almost neutral to positive experience once they entered the workforce again. This implies that organizations are willing to take steps to facilitate and smooth out the process of fitting in to the workplace.

The process of re-entry is a great struggle. The respondents were asked to identify the various measures taken by their organization to support this transition. Presence of consultants in organizations ensures that they can be accessed by women to share their grievances. The survey shows that only 17 per cent of the respondents had access to consultants in their organizations which doesn't fair well for the development and mental stability of the female employees. Other efforts taken by organizations include flexible work hours in order to ensure that there is a work-life balance, mentoring programs and gender diversity training for men. Only 8.6 per cent of the respondents stated that the men in the organizations were provided with gender diversity training in order to ensure that there was reduced bias in the workplace and gender equality is maintained.

Discussion

1. Organizations need to understand the pressure points such as the work-life balance, wage gap, job security, etc. that drive women to leave the workplace and ensure that there are systems in place to help women combat these challenges.
2. The research observed the lack of sufficient gender diversity training in organizations. When businesses make their employees aware about the diverse backgrounds of their colleagues, they train them to be aware and sensitive about others' problems and support them through it.
1. The aim behind developing such training in organizations is to communicate openness and acceptance towards both men and women equally.



2. Women look to their superiors and colleagues for support in the workplace. But, there is a weak representation of women in leadership roles. The restriction on promoting women to the top of the hierarchy remains prevalent. When women see other women at senior levels it can act as a motivation and symbol of possible progress and development in the organizations.
3. The need for a work-life balance is essential for every female employee and hence the workplace need to have facilities like flexible work hours, work from home and child care facilities to allow working mothers to efficiently contribute to their work and personal life.
4. It is the duty of the organizations to ensure the security of the female employees. There should be security cameras installed in the office premises. Strict policies against sexual harassment should be formulated and clearly communicated across all the levels of hierarchy.

Conclusion

Previously, Indian economy observed lesser willingness or motivation for women to leave their houses and join the workforce. The research observed that women are gradually looking for opportunities to join the workforce and develop themselves. They no longer just fit into the role of keeping the family together, but also look for working on their own potential, satisfaction, and gaining financial independence. The following research observed that the respondents did so more on their need to utilize their potential and not out of family pressure. The need to meet social expectations is still felt among working women and the stress of behaving according to the norms of the patriarchal society of India has a deteriorating impact on the mental health of women in the workforce. Despite all these challenges women are being accepted in the workforce and provided with various training and development opportunities such as mentoring programs, conferences and academic courses to develop their skill set and career path. The paper observed the progress of Indian economy in utilizing a significant asset of its economy i.e. the women. The organizations and society eventually have to work towards creating a positive and accepting environment which will prove to be the most beneficial.

Limitations of the study

All the research studies are subjected to certain limitations with which they are undertaken.

1. The following research was conducted with the sample of urban working women within the specified area of Mumbai only. Due to time and resource limitations it wasn't possible to conduct the survey among all working urban rural women.
2. Since it is a sample study and not a population study it can constitute of a sampling error. The respondents have been selected on the basis on Non-probability convenience sampling hence, the sample may not be the true representation of the population.
3. The research is a single cross-sectional study. The research was conducted in February-March, 2020 for a particular period of time frame. The findings of this research may not be the same during a different time period.
4. It has an objective limitation i.e. the research is conducted purely with the purpose of understanding the objectives and aspects beyond it aren't covered.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interest

We, Vedangi Thakkar and Navika Sharma, co-authors of 'Indian Women in the Workforce' declare that we have equally contributed to the following research and do not have any kind of conflict of interest.

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