

Finding the Missing Women in Indian Workforce: An Investigation

Abstract (1809)

For Subtheme:

- 3) Work-force Diversity & Inclusion and Cross cultural sensitization
 - b) Women & Work

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Abstract:

Due to demographic change as well as a stronger focus on service and knowledge intensive industries, India will face a significant shortage of (qualified) skills in the next decades. Participation of women in the workforce is crucial for any economy to optimally utilize the potential of its full human capital. However, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2016 by the World Economic Forum, no country by now has achieved gender equality. When a pool of young women who are professionally qualified to participate in the workforce and contribute towards the country, cannot utilize their true talent, it becomes even more important to know and understand the reasons for that. To secure qualified labour, it will be of vital importance for large companies to diversify the pool of (potential) employees by gaining better access to the female labour force. The paper seeks to identify the reasons of decreased female participation in Indian workforce. It is aimed at a focused target group that is young women (between the age of 25–45) who have fulltime enrollment in University education, are professionally qualified to join the workforce and are living in an urban setting, yet not contributing in the workforce.

Keywords: Women participation, Indian Workforce, Career decisions, Gender diversity

Introduction:

In order to fill the upcoming gap between labour demand and labour supply companies need to improve their access to the full talent pool by ensuring gender equality. Researches carried out in different parts of the world reveal that, women unemployment is at high rate and many women who do not participate in the workforce are not even registered as unemployed. Unprofessional day care facilities, social stigmas related to child care and babysitting are also some of the reasons of women leaving their job to raise their children. India has a rich history of women in positions of power, yet women in India face barriers at all levels in areas such as food insecurity, employment, economic and social empowerment and education (UNDP India Report 2014).

Projections based on the Global Gender Gap Report data in (2015, 2016) recommended that the target of closing the economic gap could be achieved within 118 years, or by 2133. Though the prospects for workplace gender equality have slipped beyond our lifetimes as calculated in its tenth Global Gender Gap Report, which says the world will not eliminate the gender gap until 2186. There is a clear rise of 63 years from their estimate of 2015. This

slowdown is due to chronic imbalances in salaries and labour force participation, despite the fact that, in 95 countries, women attend university in equal or higher numbers than men. The progress towards parity in the key economic pillar has slowed dramatically with the gap – which stands at 59 per cent – no larger than at any point since 2008. According to the report, the current gap in terms of economic participation between men and women and opportunities available for men and women is highest since 2008. Women have only 59 % access to opportunities to join the workforce as compared to men. Going by this pace women will not reach global parity with men for 170 years (World Economic Forum 2016).

India (Rank 87th in Gender Equality Index), reports progress this year on closing the gender gap with regard to wage equality and across all indicators of the Educational Attainment subindex, thereby, fully closing its primary and secondary education enrolment gender gaps. However, it also sees some regression on women's estimated earned income and continues to rank third-lowest in the world on Health and Survival, remaining the world's least-improved country on this subindex over the past decade. In India labour force participation rate for rural women declined from 42.5% in 1988 to 18% in 2012 and for urban women from 24.5% to 13.4% over the same span.

According to a study by the study by the McKinsey Global Institute India can increase its 2025 gross domestic product (GDP), by between 16% and 60% simply by enabling women to participate in the economy on par with men. Evidence suggests that improving gender equality could add significantly to its GDP, it's also clear that India simply can't afford to wait. With 87th rank in gender equality index women in India, account for 32% of the workforce in the informal economy, including agriculture and 20% of the non-agricultural workforce. 118 million women workers are engaged in the unorganized sector in India, constituting 97% of the total women workers in India. A large number of women work as home based workers. About 23% of the non-agricultural workers were at home based or working in their own dwellings. Home based workers were an overwhelming 57% of the workforce among women. Home-based worker refers to the general category of workers who carry out remunerative work with in their homes or in the surrounding grounds. Women turn to home-based work for a number of reasons.

Computed from the NSSO data, the number of street vendors in urban areas, in India is estimated as 1.15 million, out of which 18% are women (Round 66th). It is important also to note that nearly 60% of women from the organized sector are employed in community, social and personnel services. Women are even more under- represented in high status, higher paid and senior management level jobs. Male work force participation is greater in service sector – 15.5% as against 3.5 % female participation. Women workers are usually at the lowest-paid end of any sector, they are usually termed as unskilled, even though very often their work, though low-paid, requires a certain level of technique. One unfortunate tendency that has been noticed in the desperate search for employment that goes on in the unorganized sector is the tendency towards deskilling. Workers lose their traditional or acquired skills when they cannot find employment with these skills.

Purpose of the Research

In this scenario the common area of concern in this paper can be summarized as:

- 1) Unequal and uneven participation of women in the workforce
- 2) Lack of equal opportunities for women at entry level

- 3) Lack of equal opportunities for women in joining the career due to social and family stereotypes.

Objectives:

The objectives of this paper are

1. To identify factors that influence the career choice decision making of young women who have fulltime enrollment in University education and are professionally qualified to start their career
2. To examine the influence of perceived career barriers and supports on young women's career planning.

Theoretical Foundation & Literature Review:

Since Parsons (1909) presented the first conceptual framework for understanding individuals' career decision process, a growing number of theories and models of career development and career choice have emerged. Career development theorists have speculated about the meaning of work in people's lives. For example, Super (1951, 1953, 1963) emphasized the development and implementation of self-concept in the career development process. Holland (1966, 1985) sought to match individual personality types and environmental characteristics. Others suggested that work allowed individuals to fulfil certain basic needs (Astin, 1984; Roe, 1956). An underlying theme in these theories is that the salience of work in people's lives is important.

Although these models have made substantial contributions to the understanding of career decision making and career development, most theories are based on the experiences of white, middle-class males. Moreover, most career development theories also assume that individuals are free to choose from among an array of alternatives which are available to all. Thus, researchers have begun to question the relevance of these theories to women and individuals from different cultural, ethnic, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980). Many of the assumptions of career development theories ignore the social realities of special groups where career development may be constrained by such factors as prejudice, discrimination, and opportunity availability imposed by society's socio-political system (Griffith, 1980; Smith, 1983).

Theories related to women's career development began to emerge in the early 1980's (Astin, 1984; Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981). These theories improved on earlier theories by taking into account variables which influence women's career choices, aspirations, and work behaviors. A **socio-psychological model** of career choice and work behavior titled, 'the meaning of work in women's lives' by Astin, Helen S presents a beginning formulation of a theoretical model, which draws from both empirical evidence and past theoretical formulations of career development, to enhance an understanding of women's occupational choice and behavior. The model, which is need-based and socio-psychological, incorporates 4 constructs: motivation, expectations, sex-role socialization, and the structure of opportunity. She attempted to develop a model of career choice and work behavior that attempted to combine both personal (psychological) and social forces as well as their interaction.

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) formulated a **social cognitive model** of career development derived from Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory that illustrates the interplay among personal, background/contextual and experiential influences on career development. It focuses on dynamic mechanisms through which young people forge academic and vocational plans. The model includes personal input variables comprising personal characteristics such as gender, background/context variables comprising environmental characteristics such as parent and family influences, and learning experiences comprising variables such as objective performance, school experiences and role-modeling experiences. These variables shape and inform career-related self-efficacy (e.g., perceived task competence) and outcome expectations (e.g., anticipation of certain outcomes, such as self-satisfaction and financial reward). Self-efficacy and outcome expectations along with personal and contextual variables play an important role in the formation of interests and career goals.

Review of Literature presents several theories of Career Choice and factors affecting decision making process of men and women. Yet there is a dearth of work focusing specifically on young women who are professionally qualified and are yet not contributing to the workforce. Betz and Hackett (1997) assert that both the theory and measures of career-related self-efficacy are useful both in research examining barriers to and facilitators of women's career development and for designing and evaluating the effectiveness of practice grounded in this theory. Betz and Hackett admit the challenges for a women to not to allow herself to be pushed to traditional career, but to restore options that may have been de facto removed by sexism and gender role stereotyping as well as by other environmental barriers. Overall, self-efficacy theory is thought by many to have great potential for careers work with groups who have traditionally underachieved in certain areas for example, girls, women and minority ethnic groups. One of its strengths is that it doesn't ignore biological, social or environmental influences, or the current context. However, it does assert that as individuals get older, it's more difficult to change interests, goals and performance outcomes.

From a review of a decade of research into women and career development, Phillips and Imhoff (1997) conclude that *'women's lives are complex'*. They note that the past decade has seen significant progress towards understanding this complexity. Fitzgerald et al (1995) stress the need to study concepts and variables for women (such as those identified by Betz, 1994) which were previously regarded as unnecessary and irrelevant, concluding that this will lead to a greater understanding of the vocational behavior of everyone.

Methodology

On the basis of the construct developed after a detailed review of literature a survey instrument (Semi Structured Interview Questionnaires) was designed. The literature on Career Theories is the background with which the survey form was prepared. The paper uses a mixed approach for data collection. The in-depth interview technique used for collecting qualitative and quantitative data focused upon the relevant factors and perspectives, identified after the scrutiny of available literature questionnaire. Majority of them fall into four categories; 1) Personal Perspective, 2) Familial Perspective, 3) Workplace Perspective and 4) Societal Perspective.

The questionnaire included the items (probing questions) that could disclose the influence of perceived career barriers and supports on young women's career planning. As the respondents belong to a specific category and there are few compulsory requirements to be fulfilled like,

the respondents need to be a women, they need to be professionally qualified, they need to be non-working and also living in an urban setting, Purposive/ Judgemental sampling is used.

The survey was filled personally by the researcher. To understand reasons for their non-contribution in the workforce the questionnaire also included few open ended questions that could explore the anchors/ motivators that might encourage them to make a decision to join the workforce, if given an opportunity. **Total 18 respondents were interviewed and their responses were coded and analysed using NVIVO 11 software used for mixed methods of research.**

Major Results

This paper suggests that women career decisions are influenced by six specific factors, a) Expectations & Responsibilities, b) Support, c) Motivation, d) Flexibility, e) Conflict and f) Life Balance.

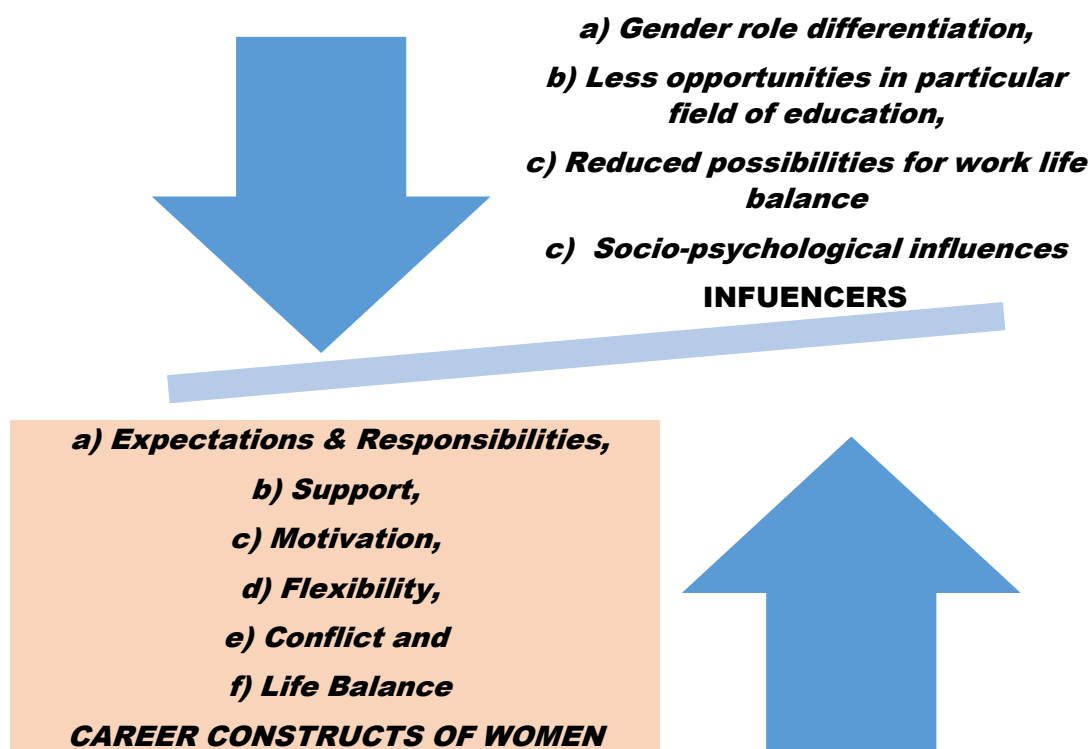


Fig:1 Constructs & Influencers of Career Decisions of Women

Women have more difficulties than men in their career advancement and participation in economic decision making. Career choice decision and career development of young women in their early phase of career is an issue that requires attention from not only an economic perspective but also from a social and psychological aspect. The career related concern or drive that shapes the self-concept and perception of a person and becomes a driving/motivating force that influences him/her while making career decisions, may be

different for men and women. There are several other factors like gender role differentiation, less opportunities for young girls in a particular field of education, reduced possibilities for work life balance in specific field of work and socio-psychological influences that result in to less participation of women in specific career choices.

The paper also highlights that balancing work and family is on the minds of college-age women long before they are married. At the same time, women continue to choose occupations that do not fully utilize their abilities and often fail to follow their original career goals.

The paper tries to sum up the influencers and trends in the non-participation decisions of women in the workforce under four broad categories: 1) Personal Perspective, 2) Familial Perspective, 3) Workplace Perspective and 4) Societal Perspective. Personal perspective includes, low self-esteem, reduced self-efficacy, lack of intrinsic motivation etc. Familial perspective includes poor support system, gender role differentiation in child care and household chores, and unavailability of role model in the family or social setting. Workplace Perspective include limited possibilities of work life balance, less flexibility, less supportive environment during critical phases of life like child birth, divorce etc. Societal Perspective includes gendered expectations & responsibilities, limited alternatives and stereotypes in field of education and career choice, poor child care facilities and socio-psychological influences. Living in urban setting provide certain level of opportunities and support services like child care facilities, trained domestic help, multispecialty hospitals and nurses for elderly parents or disabled member in the family etc. These services are very crucial for a young women to start and continue her career at that junctures when family expectations are coming in the way of her career growth/ advancement or continuation.

Implications

In India, the work participation rate of women is only 14.7 per cent in the urban areas. In the rural areas, women are mainly involved as cultivators and agricultural laborers. In the urban areas, almost 80 per cent of the women workers are working in the unorganized sectors such as household industries, petty trades and services, buildings and construction (Census 2011). According to 68th round NSS 2011-12, the WPR as per usual status (principal and subsidiary) for women of all ages in the rural area was 24.8%. It was 14.7% in the urban area and 21.9% at the national level. In the organized sector, women workers constituted 20.4 percent of the total organized sector employment in the country in 2010 comprising 17.9% in the public sector and 24.5% in the private sector. The unorganized sector is large in India, accounting for 570 million workers in 2010-2011, constituting 93% of the total workforce and 83% of the non agricultural work force.

Statistics can cuts across the realities of the lives of women and men and can produce and disseminate data that becomes a strong background for debating gender equality as a policy issue. Apart from all the statistics the moral case for gender equality should be good enough a reason to motivate the researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders to accelerate the change.

Women's participation in the labour market thus is not only an economic issue but also a larger social and an ethical question, which demands a multi-disciplinary approach. Women's economic activity is rooted mainly in socio-cultural, historical, physiological and economic considerations. Hence, looking at women's employment from the labour market point of view alone is not enough. We need to look at this problem with the intentions of introducing a transactional as well as transformational intervention at socio- cultural, political and economic levels.

It is important also to note that nearly 60% of women from the organized sector are employed in community, social and personnel services. Women are even more under- represented in high status, higher paid and senior management level jobs. Male work force participation is greater in service sector – 15.5% as against 3.5 % female participation.

Women workers are usually at the lowest-paid end of any sector, they are usually termed as unskilled, even though very often their work, though low-paid, requires a certain level of technique. Furthermore, many of the skills that women learn are those that are in some way connected to care and reproduction, which are often not regarded as skills at all. For example, some skills which are not recognized now, but which exist with local populations -- women in forest areas, have a skill of recognizing and using herbal plants.

Often a woman's skills may not be regarded as skills at all, either by the person who is documenting the skills, or even by the women themselves. Secondly, the potential marketability of a particular skill is never recognized. This refers to a woman's skills which currently may not be marketed but which may have a good market potential like embroidery or knowledge of herbs. Finally, the 'care' skills of the women can no longer be side-lined. These would include knowledge of child-care, care of the sick and particular skills such as mid-wifery. Only then a measurement of a women's skill will capture the extent of her 'specialization'. One unfortunate tendency that has been noticed in the desperate search for employment that goes on in the unorganized sector is the tendency towards deskilling. Workers lose their traditional or acquired skills when they cannot find employment with these skills.

Hence this paper makes an effort to diagnose this problem through a socio-cultural and economic angle and investigate the reasons for low participation of women in Indian workforce. Policy makers and stakeholders need to identify the factors that affect the career choice decisions of young women to join the workforce. This might help them to understand the real aspirations, interests and brilliance of young women.

Limitations & Scope for future Research:

A mixed approach for collecting responses of women, who fit in the category predefined for the study, was adopted. For the purpose of rapport building the author had to devote lot of time for conducting in-depth interviews of the respondents. Both open ended and close ended questions were personally asked by the author and responses were then transcribed. Such approach requires lot of time and resources and also limits the number of responses. A

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