

CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN THE PURSUIT OF THEIR CAREER ASPIRATIONS: A STUDY CARRIED OUT IN THE IT SECTOR

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Abstract

The relevance of women's participation in the workforce cannot be overemphasized. Studies have proved beyond reasonable conviction that the quality of decision making and long-term sustainability of any given business is positively impacted by participation of women professionals. As of December 2023, the total workforce in the Indian IT/ITES/BPO is around 4.5 million (*study-2023, n.d.*). Of this, women professionals comprise 34% of their workforce. However, a majority of them are found at the entry level. A cause for concern is that almost 48% of the women professionals in IT attrite before they reach 30 years of age. (*Economics Times-June, n.d.*) This phenomenon is primarily due to the challenges faced by working women in the pursuit of their careers. This high workforce pipeline leakage of women professionals in the IT sector is disquieting as huge investments are made in training these women and rendering them productive. Hence ensuring their continued existence by way of talent retention assumes significance. Career aspirations are the vision of one's future and are fundamental building blocks for a successful career. These aspirations are shaped during the formative years and may undergo transformation according to the experiences of the working professional. This study attempts to understand the factors that impact career aspirations and challenges faced by women professionals in the pursuit of their aspirations. The study also examines the difference in the paths pursued by certain successful women professionals in contrast to the average working women. The study has adopted a mixed method approach involving extensive literature review, survey method and case studies. Respondents comprised primarily working women professionals from IT, ITES and BPO. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from 414 women working professionals in IT, ITES & BPO. The study adopted snowball sampling and convenience sampling. From among the respondents, successful women professionals were identified and interview schedules were conducted to generate additional facets of undiscovered parameters and a model was developed. Under the qualitative case study method, an unstructured, free-wheeling discussions was held with 6 women professionals. The findings from these case studies were extracted which in turn helped to test the final model. Chi square was applied as a measure of multiple hypothesis. In most cases marriage and related responsibilities were the major life events that resulted in career break.

Keywords: Working Women Professionals, Challenges, Career Break, and Talent Retention.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of women's participation in workforce cannot be overemphasized. Numerous studies have shown that women's participation improves the quality of

decision-making, helps maintain balanced viewpoints resulting in higher profitability and long-term sustainability. Interestingly, the total workforce in the IT (including ITES & BPO) is 4.5 million. Of these 34% are women IT professionals. However, a majority of these women are found at the entry levels. Almost 50% of the workforce at the entry levels comprise women. However, as they progress towards the mid-managerial levels, the ration proportion of women drastically reduces to 25%. That is because 48% of the female employees quit their jobs well before they reach 30 years of age.

This phenomenon is described as the high workforce pipeline leakage (Acharya, 2021). It is unacceptable as major resources are invested in training them and rendering them productive. Hence the importance of retaining such talented and experienced women assumes importance.

Women in IT -The Indian scenario: Until the 1990s India was steeped in traditionalism with respect to the role of women in workforce participation. However, in the 1990s with the LPG era, (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization), and the ensuing IT revolution, numerous career opportunities were created in the domain if IT in India. Consequently, women felt encouraged to take up technical education as these courses were perceived to provide lucrative jobs with reasonable job security too.

However, these women were also required to travel quite extensively to their customer sites, work well beyond their office hours. (Hellenga, 2002) All these entailed stays away from home. So, though these jobs were considered lucrative, women professionals also faced a lot of pressure when it came to pulling together support and acceptance from their families and society.

Career Aspirations

(Hellenga, 2002) Opined career aspirations represent a person's orientation towards a desired career goal under exemplary conditions. According to (Johnson-Hunt, 2020), it represents the dreams that individuals have about the meaning of an ideal occupation.

Career aspirations are the essential constructing blocks for a successful career of a working professional. They are shaped during the formative years before employment and experience changes and transformation as the individual goes into employment.

The career aspirations constantly metamorphosizes and is the resultant of a complex matrix of motivating factors, called push-up factors in this study and challenges that are encountered at the workplace, suitably called the pull-down factors in the study.

Phases of Career Aspirations

Formative phase: According to (Desirae M. Domenico, 2006) career aspirations are influenced by myriad factors like socioeconomic status, gender, race, parental education, their occupation and parental expectations. This refers to the time before the working professionals enter the workforce. The term 'Formative phase' has been coined by the researcher.

Here is an insight about the factors that shape the career aspirations during the formative phase:

Socioeconomic Status: (*Wei-Cheng Mau, 2000*) Opined that there is a positive association between the socioeconomic status of a family and their career aspirations. (*Sellers, 1999*) Opined that that youth from the higher strata of society are more likely to be knowledgeable and choose professional occupations.

Gender & Race: (*LEE, 2010*)opined that gender and race played a pivotal role in determining career aspirations.

Occupational status & educational levels of parents: According to (*Blackhurst, 2000; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000*), the career aspirations of children are closely related to the occupation pursued by their parents. This is especially true with respect to the profession pursued by the mother.

Educational levels: According to (*Gutek, 2000*), the more educated a woman is, the likelihood of her engaging in paid employment is higher.

Career Aspirations- Transformative phase-I In the previous sections, the influencers of the Transformative phase of career aspirations were discussed. Those factors help an individual to form their career aspirations before they set out on their career journey.

Subsequently begins a new journey, which the study refers to as Transformative phase-I. In this phase a fresh set of factors impinge on the consciousness of women professionals. These factors play an important role of shaping and transforming the career aspirations of working women professionals.

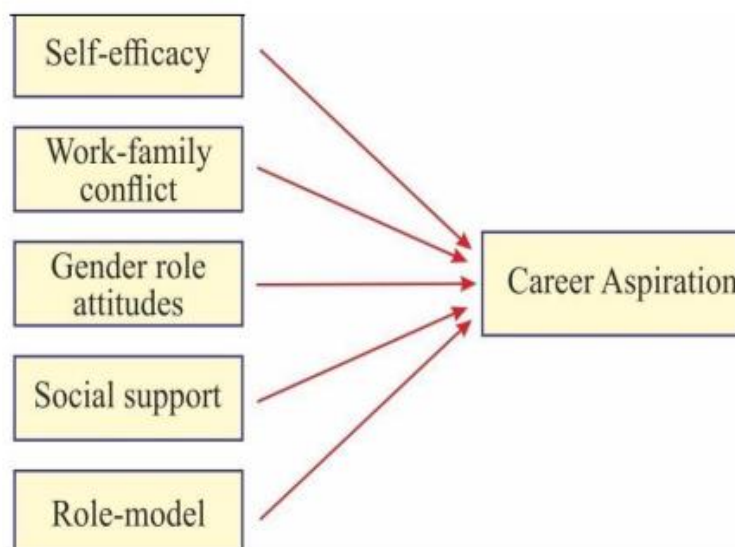


Fig 1.2: Antecedent factors

Source: Model of Career Aspirations for Women Employees-Social Cognitive Career Theory, (2007)

(Acharya, 2021) In the thesis titled, " Career Aspiration among women IT professionals. A study on recalibrations after a career break, 2021.

The diagram 1.2 explains the five antecedent factors that form the basis of career aspirations for working women professionals.

Self-efficacy: This means efficiency or effectiveness. In any given occupation, self-efficacy leads to a higher level of career-aspiration.

Lower level of work-family conflict: Where the woman professional is able to balance her profession with domestic commitments, it instils a higher level of career aspiration.

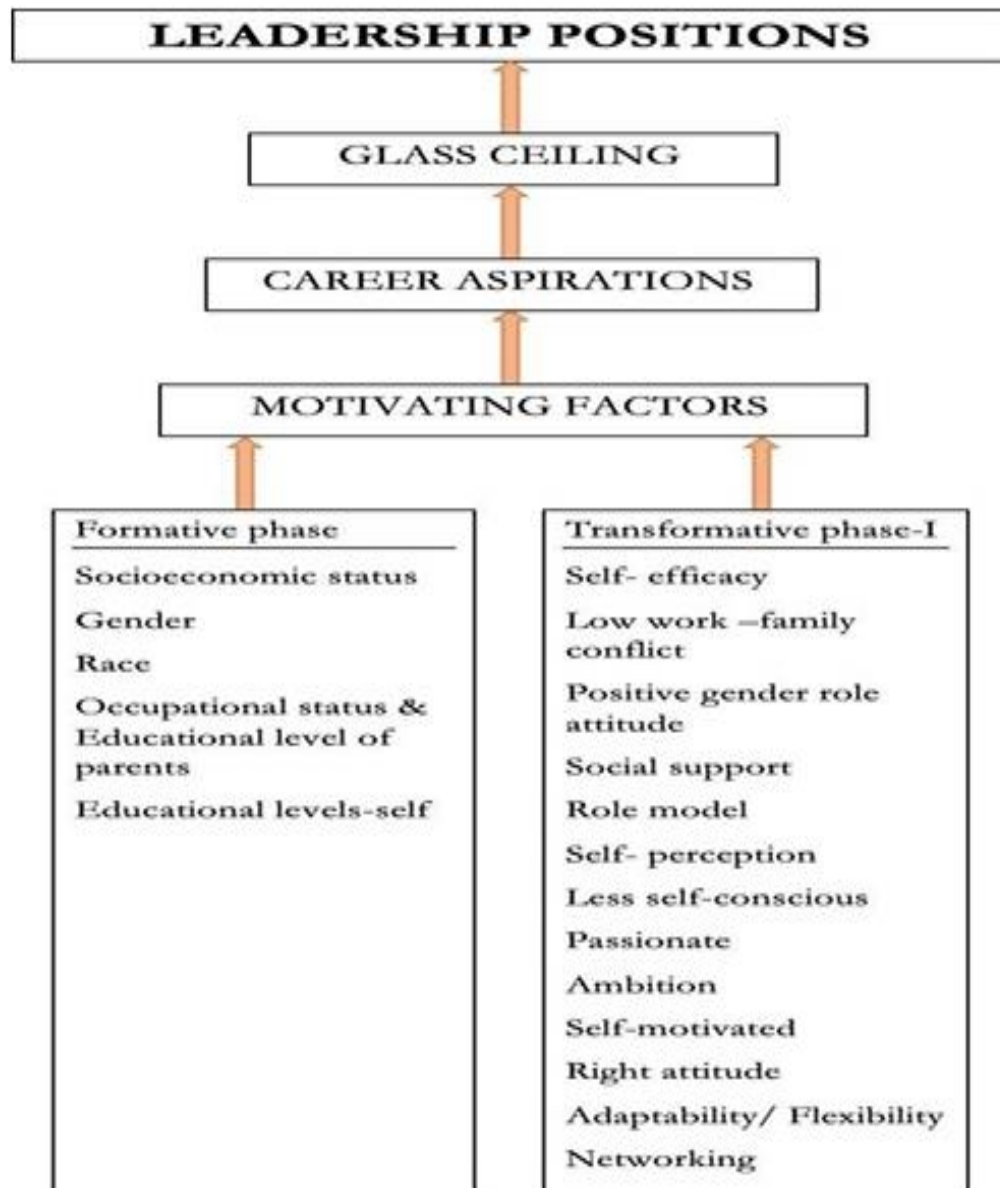
Social support: Coping style includes support from the family as well as society. When support is extended either by family or by society to a working woman, coping with work pressures is rendered easier.

Positive gender role: Where there is no discrimination at the workplace, it becomes easier for the woman professional to focus on her career aspirations.

Role-model: Where a woman professional sees that women who face similar challenges are able to successfully overcome them, it proves to be a motivating factor for such women employees.

Self-perception: A person's self-perceptions plays a pivotal role in defining her career aspirations.

Passion, Ambitions, self-motivation and right attitude: All these factors play a significant role in defining the career aspirations of women professionals.



(Acharya, 2021) The abovementioned model was designed by Shalini Acharya in the thesis titled” Career Aspirations Among Women IT Professionals A Study on Re Calibration After A Career Break”

Challenges faced by working women professionals in India:

The new generation of well qualified and ambitious women professionals form a pool of talented human resource. They are driven by the ambition to achieve career success and the desire for financial independence. However, social, structural, organizational and personal factors manage to inexorably catch up with most of such aspiring women

professionals and exact a price which more often than not, results in a career break. Nearly 48% of women in IT take a break from their career before they reach 30 years of age. This results in a sizeable pool of women professionals with an average of 3-10 years of experience, taking a career break, thereby giving up on their career aspirations.

Classification of challenges

Sociocultural barriers: (Rojewski, 2015) opined that commitments relating to family and child care are deeply entrenched among women irrespective of the nationality and continent they belong. Marriage, re-location of spouse, accompanying spouse after marriage after quitting their jobs, child bearing, child-birth and the maternal responsibilities post child birth, care of the elderly (unique to India) are some of the challenges that qualify as sociocultural barriers.

So sociocultural barriers include factors like societal mindset that perceives women as caregivers, moral policing as in being judgmental about career ambitious women, patriarchal norms, stereotypical occupations, gender gap in education, family life a priority and related challenges.

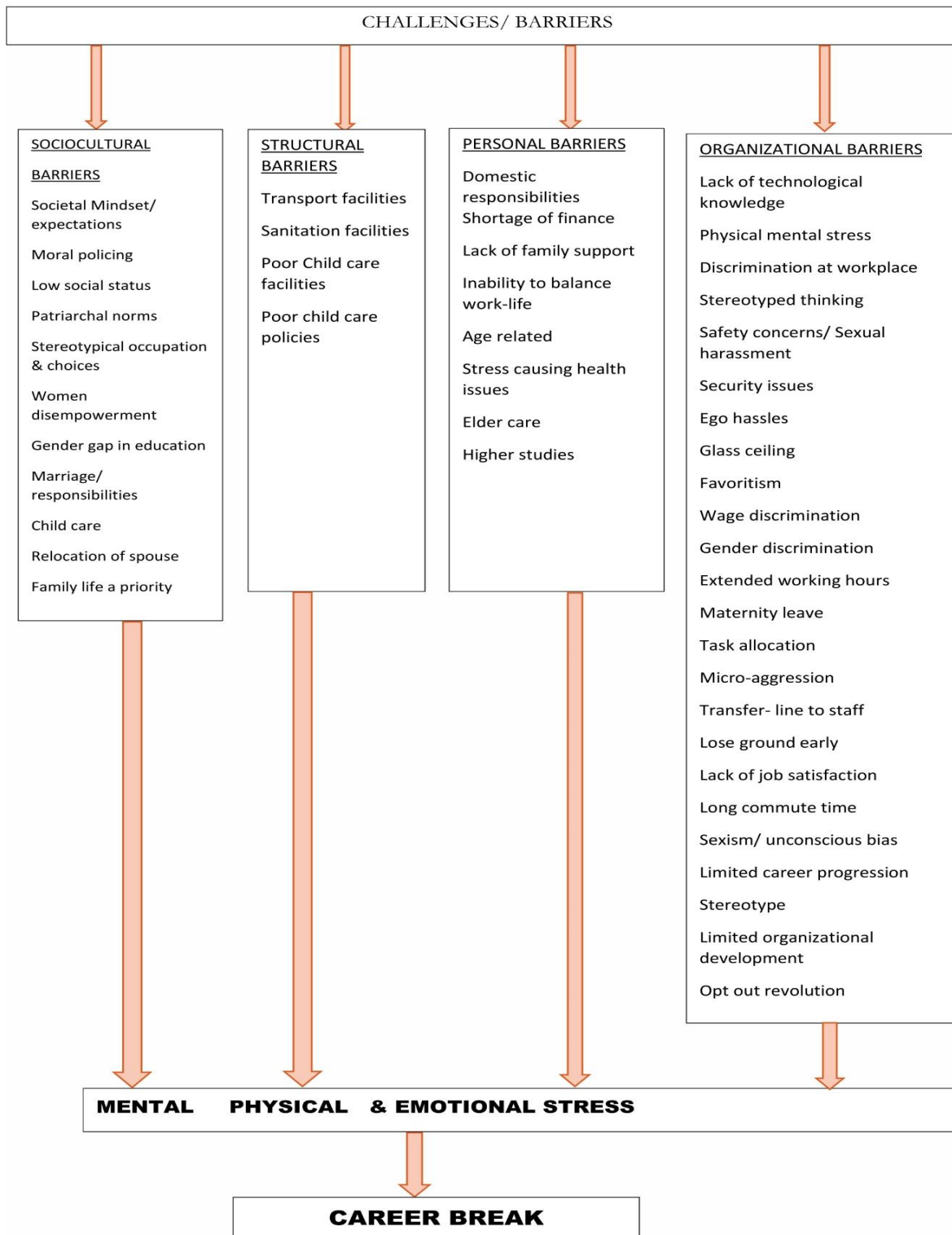
Structural Barriers: These barriers include lack of transportation facilities, especially where the residence is far away from the place of work, poor sanitation facilities at work, lack of child care facilities at work or poor facilities if available and poor child care policies.

Organizational barriers: These include barriers that are related to the profession or the organization and include any or all of the following: Lack of technical knowledge resulting from redundancy, enormous mental stress emanating from lack of work-life balance, stereotypical thinking in the workplace, discrimination or sexual harassment at workplace, safety concerns, extended working hours, poor levels of job satisfaction, unconscious bias, limited organizational development. All these may result in an opt out revolution.

Personal Barriers: When women professionals are overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities compounded by lack of family support, career takes a back-seat. Where the woman has reached a certain age, health may start to deteriorate, stress issues, elder care and higher studies of children may be other personal barriers impacting career aspirations.

The Model developed by the researcher throws light on the classification of the barriers as discussed and the outcome of the barriers are also included in the model.

Model on challenges based on Literature review



(Acharya, 2021) The abovementioned model was designed by the researcher in the thesis titled, "Career Aspirations among women professionals. A study of recalibrations after a career break.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to L (*Company, 2018*), there is a great chance of women dealing with micro aggression. Women on the one hand are under pressure to perform in the professional domain and at times feel left out as they have domestic responsibilities as well. Sometimes they are unable to manage and balance both; this results in them leaving their jobs in large numbers. (*Kapur, Career Development, 2018*) Opined that the intense levels of commitments demonstrated by women towards their familial commitments more often than not hinder their career growth. This study made several recommendations like career counselling, guidance, approachable attitude of managers and leaders, mentoring and provision of a congenial atmosphere to women to enable them to manage their professional and personal lives. (*Saundarya Rajesh, 2015*) Highlighted some interesting insights into the myriad reasons for career breaks among working women professionals. These reasons were classified into sociocultural, structural, personal and organizational factors. The study made numerous recommendations to retain women talent in IT organizations. According to the (*Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013*) at every successive level of management, there are a large pool of talented women professionals who opt out of their careers. This report highlights upon how three factors namely, unconscious bias, career breaks and flexible working create barriers to women's career progression and contribute to the loss of leadership talent. (*Timewise, 2018*) Report threw light on the brain drain of female talent at the middle and senior management levels. According to the report, hiring experienced returners is an innovative way to increase the envelope of female talent pipeline and encourage the presence of more senior women talent in the organization. That paved the way for improved retention levels.

Various other studies delved into the multifaceted challenges encountered by women in their career and professional development. (*Bhalalusesa, 2010*) Research underscores the need for gender sensitization particularly in developing nations where gender analysis is still evolving, advocating for shared family and societal responsibilities. Building on this (*Barbara Orser, 2011*) delves into personal, firm and industry level obstacles with a significant portion attributed to gender-related challenges. Another research (*Sumita Datta, 2017*) investigates factors influencing the women leadership pipeline in corporate India, utilising a qualitative approach involving women managers and their supervisors. In the context of the Indian IT industry, (*Jyoti Chauhan, 2022*) explores challenges faced by women and examined the impacts of mentoring, Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and Family Responsibilities (FR) on Perceived Career Success (PCS) and career advancement. The findings had suggested to implement leadership strategies to foster gender equality and address barriers hindering women's career success. Lastly, another research compared career experiences of South Asian and American women in the U.S. IT workforce, (*Adya, 2008*) revealing diverse perspectives on social, cultural and

individual factors. Collectively these studies contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for women in diverse professional settings.

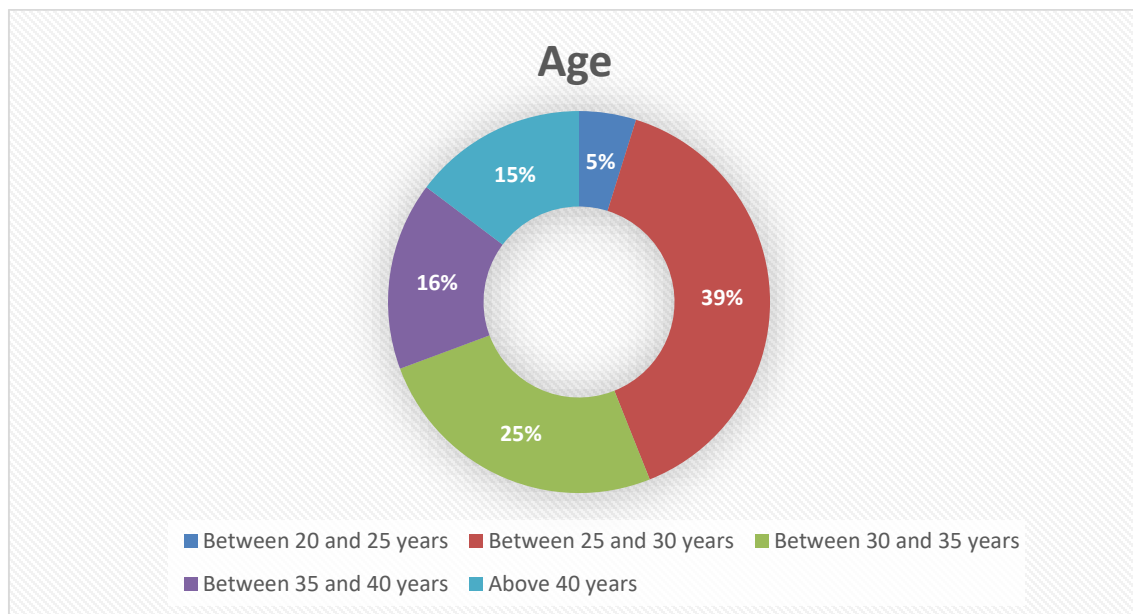
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical investigation gathered data from 414 respondents in the IT industry. Employing a meticulously crafted survey instrument comprising 13 questions with 8 demographic questions, the study sought to illuminate the intricate landscape of career aspirations among women professionals and unravel the challenges inherent in their respective domains. The primary objective of the analysis was to substantiate anticipated correlations between age of respondents and the multifaceted factors influencing their career ambitions. The outcomes of this inquiry carry substantial theoretical and practical significance, providing nuanced insights into the women's professional trajectories, particularly within the Indian context. Additionally, the research methodology was characterized by a comprehensive reliance on secondary data gleaned from diverse and reputable outlets, including published journal articles, research papers and newspapers. This comprehensive approach not only enriched the discourse with valuable perspectives but also facilitated the identification of research adequacy within the purview of the study. This in turn contributed to a more profound comprehension of the intricate dynamics surrounding the career aspirations of women professionals in the Indian landscape.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Divisions

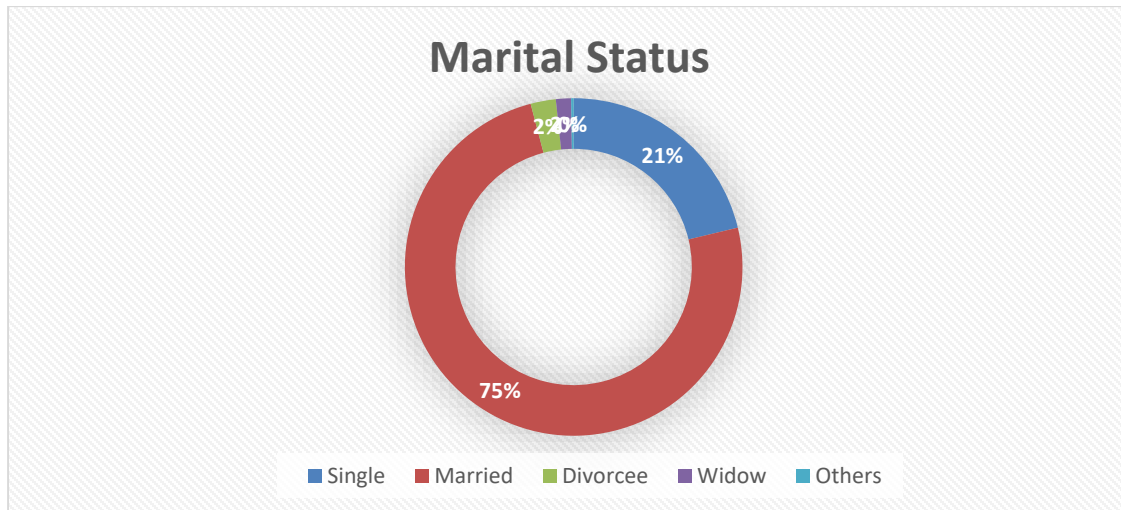
4.1.1. Age of respondents



The age distribution of respondents in this study is detailed in the above chart. The largest age group among the participants falls within the 25-30 years range that comprised 39%

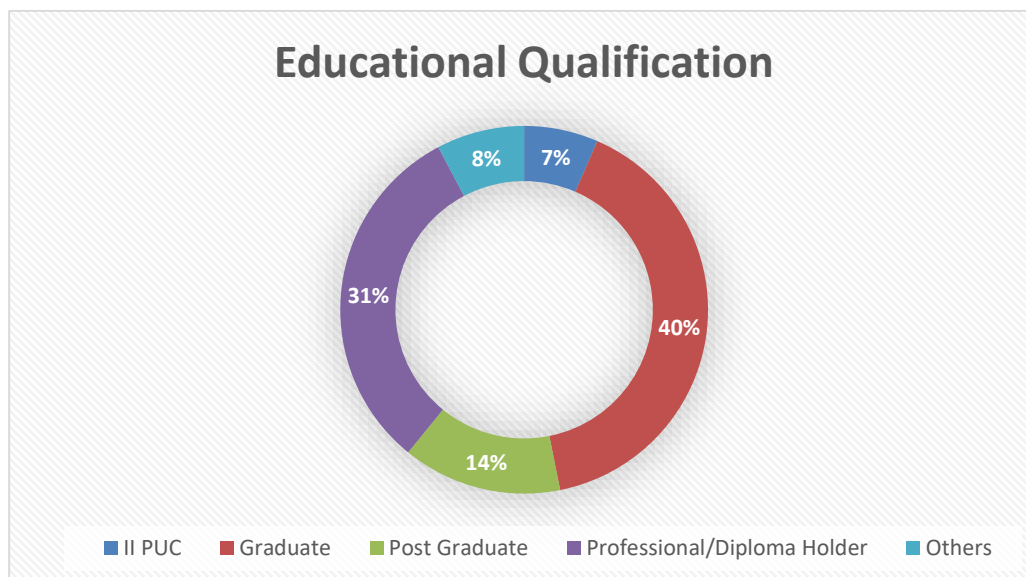
of the total respondents, with a substantial count of 162 individuals. The second largest group is in the 30-35 years range that represented 25% of the sample consisting 105 participants. Other age groups have also contributed to the data set making up smaller proportions. The cumulative total of respondents in the study is 414, provided a comprehensive overview of the age demographics within the sample.

4.1.2. Marital Status of respondents



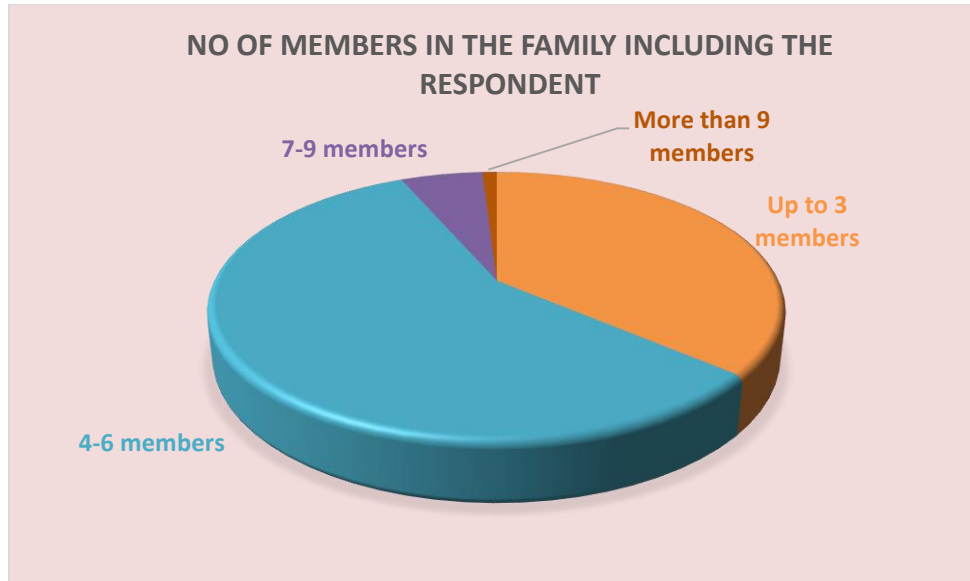
The chart above depicts the marital status of participants. The primary marital group among respondents is the married category, constituting 75% of the total participants. The second- largest group consists of respondents in the single category making up 21%. Other marital status groups have also made contributions to the dataset, though in smaller proportions.

4.1.3. Educational Qualification of respondents



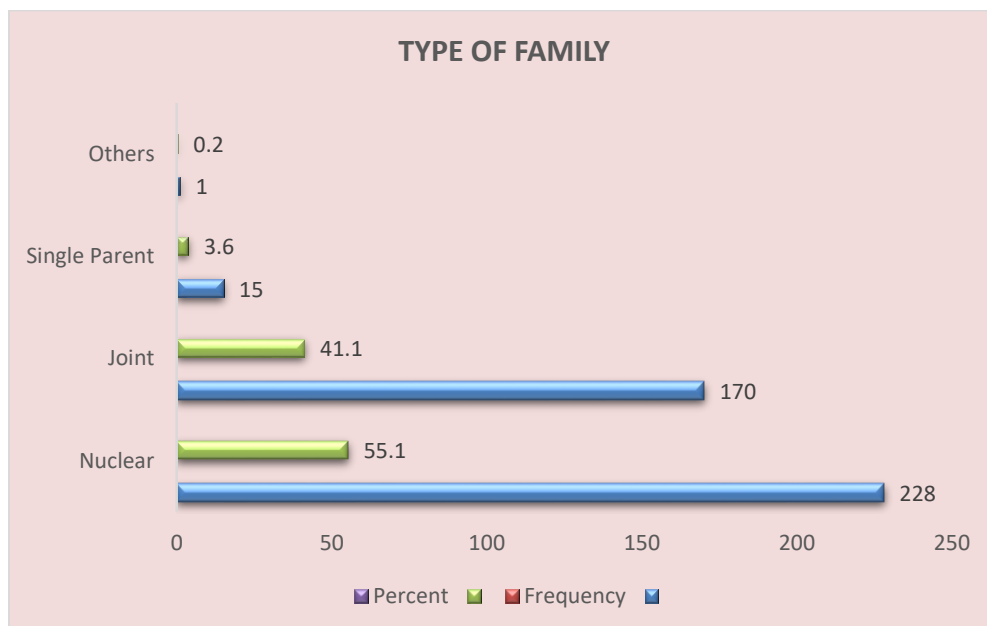
The chart above depicts the educational qualification of participants. The primary educational group among respondents is the Graduate category, constituting 40% of the total participants. The second- largest group consists of respondents is the Professional/Diploma holder category making up 31%. Other marital status groups have also made contributions to the dataset, though in smaller proportions.

4.1.4 No. of members in the family including the respondents



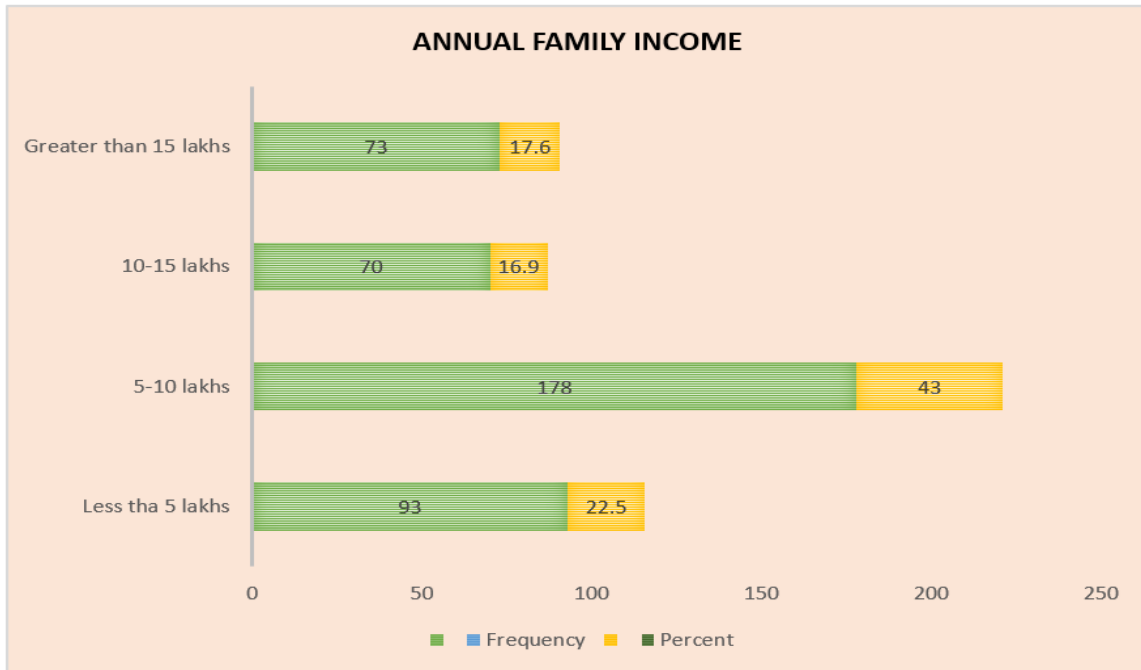
237 respondents (57.2%) were staying in a medium size family with 4 to 6 family members, whereas the family size of 150 respondents was up to 3 family members.

4.1.5 Type of Family



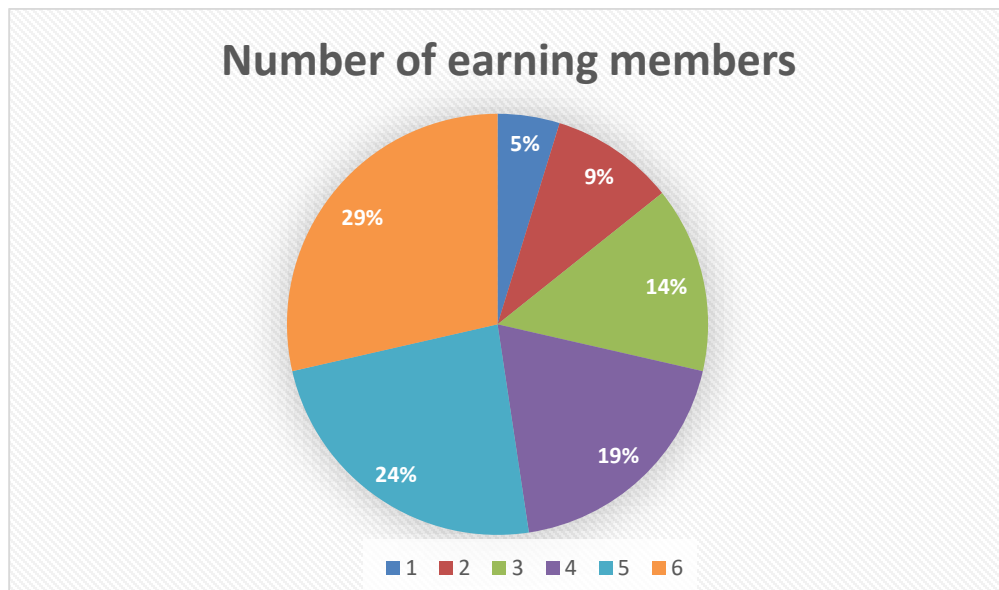
Around 228 respondents lived in a nuclear family (55.1%) followed by 170 respondents living in the joint family (41.1%).

4.1.6 Annual Family Income



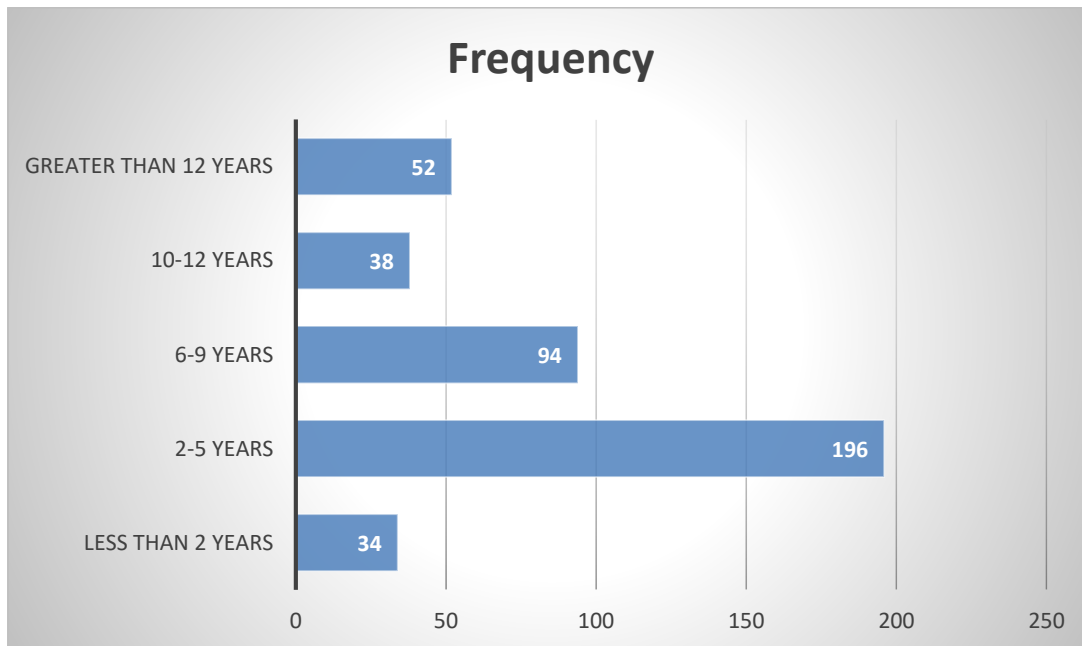
Amongst the surveyed respondents, the annual family income of 178 respondents is between 5-10 lakhs of rupees (43%) followed by 93 respondents with their annual family income being less than 5 lakhs rupees (22.5%)

4.1.7 Number of Earning members in the Family



There are two earning members in the family for maximum number of the respondents summing to 284 respondents (68.6%), followed with a huge difference with 65 respondents only, having three earning members in their family (15.7%).

4.1.8 Work experience



Out of 414 respondents, majority of the women had 2-5 years of work experience, i.e., 196 respondents (47.3%) whereas, 94 women had 6-9 years of work experience (22.7%).

4.2 Testing the hypotheses

The survey method adopted in this study resulted in remarkable findings relating to the career aspirations of women professionals in the IT industry.

Objective (i)

To study the factors influencing career aspirations amongst women professionals

Analysis of Factors impacting Career aspirations among women professionals

Test- Henry Garrett Ranking method

Garrett's ranking technique is used to rank six factors influencing the career aspirations amongst women professionals. The respondents were asked to rank the factors from most important to least important.

The factors included were:

- A. Earn a livelihood
- B. Childhood aspiration
- C. Parental advice

- D. Influence of friends/ peers
- E. Better job opportunities
- F. Others

Formula used: Percent Position= $100 \frac{(R_{ij}-0.5)}{N_j}$

R_{ij} = Rank given for ith item by the jth sample respondents.

N_j = Total rank given by the jth sample respondents.

Table 1: Frequency of ranks for different factors

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

Interpretation: The above table shows the factors like earning a livelihood, childhood aspiration, parental advice, influence of friends/ peers, better job opportunities and a few other factors that influence the career aspirations amongst women professionals from most critical to less critical rank wise among the 414 respondents, earning a livelihood is considered to be most critical whereas, parental advice, influence of friends/ peers and a few other factors are less critical.

Table 2: Garrett Scores and 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

Interpretation: The above table shows the ranks of the factors based on average scores.

Objective (ii)
 To challenges faced by women professionals in pursuit of their aspirations.

Analysis of Challenges faced by women professionals in pursuit of their Career

The chi-square test examined the relationship between marital status and the challenges faced by women professionals in pursuit of their career aspirations. The Null hypothesis (H_0) considered for the test was that there was no significant relationship between marital status and the challenges faced by women professionals in pursuit of their career aspirations while the Alternate Hypothesis (H_1) considered for the test was that there was

a significant relationship between marital status and the challenges faced by women professionals in pursuit of their career aspirations.

Socio-Cultural Barriers	P Value
Marital status & Family life being a priority	.000
Marital status & Unable to handle role pressures between family and work	.000

Since the P value is .000 which is less than .050, it is an evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant association between the marital status and career break due to the family life being a priority of the respondents. It can also be concluded that there is a significant association between the marital status and career break of the women professionals given their ability to handle the role pressures between family and work.

Structural Barriers	P Value
Marital status & Long time to commute	.117
Marital status & Poor child care facilities	.032

Since the P value is .117 which is greater than .050, it can be an evidence to accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant association between the marital status and career break of the women professionals due the long commute time. While the P value of second part is .032 which is less than .050, it is an evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant association between the type of the family of the respondents affects career break due to lack of support system for child care.

Personal Barriers	P Value
Marital status & Health issues	.041
Marital status & Pursuing higher studies	.242

Since the P value is .041 which is less than .050, it is an evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant association between the marital status and career break of the women professionals due their health issues. While the other barrier has a P value of .242 which is greater than .050, it is an evidence to reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant association between the marital status and career break of the women professionals due the limited growth opportunities in their professions.

Organizational Barriers	P Value
Marital status & Workplace harassment	.022
Marital status & Long/ extended working hours	.680

Since the P value is .022 which is less than .050, it is an evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant association between the marital status and career break of the women professionals due the harassment at the workplace. While the P value of the other barrier is .680 which is greater than .050, it an evidence to reject the alternate hypothesis and

accept the null hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant association between the marital status and career break of the women professionals when they have to quit their work due to their longer working hours.

Objective (iii)

To identify strategies adopted by successful women professionals to overcome challenges.

Analysis of strategies adopted by successful women professionals to overcome challenges

The strategies adopted by successful women were as follows-

- Earn decent amount of money.
- Gain societal respect.
- Be financially independent.
- Become a leader in my chosen career.
- Earn recognition at work place.
- Remain up to date through continuous learning.
- Obtain many promotions in my organization or business.
- Manage a long career innings.

Paired Samples Correlations		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Earn decent amount of money (After) & Earn decent amount of money (Before)	414	.405	.000
Pair 2	Gain societal respect. (Before) & Gain societal respect. (After)	414	.299	.000
Pair 3	Be financially independent. (Before) & Be financially independent. (After)	414	.081	.100
Pair 4	Become a leader in my chosen career (Before) & Become a leader in my chosen career (After)	414	.147	.003
Pair 5	Earn recognition at work place (Before) & Earn recognition at work place (After)	414	.146	.003
Pair 6	Remain up to date through continuous learning (Before) & Remain up to date through continuous learning (After)	414	.072	.144
Pair 7	Obtain many promotions in my organization or business (Before) & Obtain many promotions in my organization or business (After)	414	.007	.888
Pair 8	Manage a long career innings (After) & Manage a long career innings (Before)	414	.169	.001

Pair 1- since the P value is .000 which is less than .050 this gives a clear indication to reject null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Reason- the positive correlation between these paired observations might indicate that individuals who aspired to earn a decent amount of money before career break were likely to maintain or achieve that aspiration over time.

Pair 2- since the P value is .000 which is less than .050 this gives a clear indication to reject null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Reason- the positive correlation indicates that individuals who valued societal respect before still value it afterward.

Pair 3- Since the P value is .100 which is greater than .050, this gives an indication that the null hypothesis must be accepted and alternate hypothesis must be rejected. Reason- there could have been a change in the importance attached to financial independence which the women associate to.

Pair 4- since the P value is .003 which is less than .050 this gives a clear indication to reject null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Reason- the aspiration still remains constant among the women professionals.

Pair 5- since the P value is .003 which is less than .050 this gives a clear indication to reject null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Reason- women professionals those who valued workplace recognition before still do it afterwards.

Pair 6- Since the P value is .144 which is greater than .050, this gives an indication that the null hypothesis must be accepted and alternate hypothesis must be rejected. Reason- maybe women feel that staying up to date is not relevant (they do not give it more importance).

Pair 7- Since the P value is .888 which is greater than .050, this gives an indication that the null hypothesis must be accepted and alternate hypothesis must be rejected. Reason- change in career advancement goals over time.

Pair 8- since the P value is .003 which is less than .050 this gives a clear indication to reject null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Reason- women professionals are having a consistent desire to manage a long career.

5. FINDINGS

This study focuses on factors that shape their career aspirations, challenges those working women professionals face in the pursuit of their career aspirations, sometimes these challenges result in career breaks and sometimes women manage to stoically overcome these barriers through focused efforts and familial and or societal support. This study throws light on the difference in paths pursued by some working women professionals that defines their success; this is in contrast to the average women who simply find the challenges overwhelming and therefore take a career break.

The various challenges faced by working women professionals in the pursuit of their respective careers have been classified as personal, socio-cultural, organizational and structural.

The survey method revealed that marriage and related factors were very crucial factors that resulted in a career break. This was because several factors emanated from marriage like challenges emanating from relocation of the spouse, child-bearing, child-birth and child-care. After a career break, when the woman professionals return to work, they find

themselves in a difficult situation as the world has moved on and the skills possessed by them border on redundancy. Re-skilling requires more investment with respect to time and money which the woman professional may be averse to invest as her scope of domestic responsibilities have increased phenomenally. The study focused on working women professionals in the IT domain.

Findings from the tests

It is a foregone conclusion that every human being looks for materialistic returns from every effort. So, it is normal for every human to put in effort to be financially stable. Earning a livelihood was given the maximum importance by the women respondents. It is believed that aspirations are formed among children early in life; however realistic career aspirations are shaped during adolescence. The career aspirations among young girls are shaped by the professions/ occupations pursued by their mothers. This can mean that early dreams and interests of their childhood has made an impact on their career choices since then. Hence, these experiences and interests from childhood may have influenced the career paths of women professionals. In a country like India where the parental educational background and the parental occupation plays a very important role in defining the career aspirations of children or young adults, the Indian culture gives an importance to the elders in the family. Young adults look up to their parents for advice. This is particularly true where the parents are educated and are in a position to give valuable guidance and advice. The factors like social environment i/e., opinions and choices of friends and peers may have played a role in shaping the career aspirations of women professionals. Peer pressure plays a very important role in making a career choice. Another result was that women professionals consider job prospects and opportunities as a factor in determining their career aspirations. A job in the IT domain is seen as a lucrative profession. So lucrative job opportunities ranked as an important factor in making career choices.

Women across the globe are perceived to be care givers. From pre-historic times, men were perceived to be bread winners and women were held responsible for the well-being of the family. Hence, once a woman gets married, the upkeep of her new family becomes her responsibility as her upbringing instils the domestic responsibility upon her. After marriage the working woman professionals' dons various hats, that of a wife, a daughter-in-law of the family. Once she procreates, she assumes the role of a mother too. In juggling all these responsibilities, the professionalism of the woman takes a backseat. Long commute time can be challenging for most professionals, irrespective of their marital status. Long commute time is perceived as a waste of time. This is irrespective of the gender and marital status of the professional. Once a woman professional gets into the family way, she is saddled with multiple responsibilities emanating from motherhood. During this challenging period, if she receives support from her immediate family members or relatives, she can manage to stay afloat. In case of nuclear families, the woman professional may find it rather difficult to source a dependable care-taker for her child/ children. Under such circumstances, she is forced to take a career break. When women professionals consistently undergo stress, they start suffering from health issues.

Severe health crisis can sound the death knell of any flourishing career. When any woman professional does not see her career graph growing despite putting in efforts, it is natural for her to feel frustrated and quit the job. This is irrespective of whether she is married or not. When a woman professional faces discrimination or harassment at the work-place, she feels demoralized and decides to quit the workplace. Marital status plays an essential role here. This is because, she may be encouraged by her spouse to quit the toxic workplace and look for alternatives. Meanwhile she can depend on her spouse for mental comfort and livelihood. Long working hours may play havoc, especially when it is for a consistent and long period of time. It generates stress in the person and may lead to health issues. So irrespective of marital status, long working hours is not desirable for any working professional.

Redundancy is a constant in the IT industry and an important way to overcome obsolescence is to undergo training and remain relevant in the market. So, women who undergo training manage to remain relevant and manage to earn well despite a career break. A person normally undergoes training to remain relevant, earn well as well as to feel valued at workplace. This fulfills the self-esteem needs of an individual. So, there is a logical connect between training and the need for societal respect. After earning for a few years and becoming financially independent, the women professional is sufficiently well heeled financially and therefore looks for fulfilling self-esteem needs. Becoming financially independent may be a priority during the first few years of pursuing a career. As a woman professional progresses in her career, her self-esteem needs increase. Therefore, assuming leadership positions acquire greater importance than just becoming financially independent. Self-esteem needs like being offered leadership positions, recognition, being valued at workplace assume higher priority as a woman professional progresses in her career. When she is trained, she is confident and relevant. Thus she feels the need to be recognized for her skill and talent. The women professional who are trained are comfortable with their achievements don't feel insecure about themselves. They would have reached a certain stage where they are quite confident about their skills, talent and achievements. Hence, they not desperate to re-train in order to stay relevant. Sometimes, after a certain age, maintaining a work-life balance assumes greater importance rather than being rewarded with higher responsibilities. As a professional climbs the corporate ladder, greater responsibilities are a natural outcome.

Women professionals may be averse to taking higher responsibilities; however, they are certainly keen to stay afloat with their careers, as their sense of identity comes only with their careers. Else, they feel a sense of loss of identity and may end up depressed if they are separated from their profession. Hence after a certain age, they shy away from leadership positions and deliberately dilute their aspirations and just manage to stay afloat. This applies to a majority of the working women professionals. However, there are some who are different and are raring to go. Such women undertake training and do all that is required to channelize their ambitions and passion to work.

6. SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY TO PARENTS, ROLE-MODELS AND TEACHERS

This detailed study has myriad actionable recommendations for teachers, role-models and parents. An important finding of this study was that career aspirations crystallize during the formative stage and are very fundamental for the achievement of any objective of any magnitude for each and every individual. In summation it may be stated that childhood and adolescence are very important formative years for career aspirations and these are influenced by parents, role-models and teachers.

It is therefore important that self-belief tools are used at this crucial phase to instil important characteristics like strength of character, self-belief, ambitious yet realistic goals, self-confidence and the like.

Teachers, parents and role-models have a pivotal role at this juncture.

Suggestions from the survey method: Organizations can substantially reduce the attrition levels of working women professionals by analysing in detail, the challenges and problems faced by the women professionals in different stages of their careers and lives. Some timely interventions in the policies and programs such as pay parity, no discrimination at work place, remote options, flexi-work time [as is being followed now in many IT organizations] would attract highly talented women professionals who are keen to re-enter the work-force pipeline.

Based on their performance, working women professionals should be encouraged with suitable promotions in the higher echelons of management. Provision of suitable and credible child care will pave the way for more talented women to continue with their careers post child-birth.

Some of the suggestions made by women professionals to organizations to retain women talent were as follows:

Gender parity, flexible working hours, encourage extensive feedback, encourage innovative feedback, work-life balance, day care facility for infants, amelioration policies and leadership with emotional intelligence.

Suggestions of the study to working women professionals:

- Importance of remaining relevant through continuous training as the IT domain is plagued by obsolescence and redundancy.
- Importance of communication, enthusiasm, and assertiveness.
- Need to internalize the revolution. Women should not suffer from guilt pangs as they are ambitious about their careers.
- Try to be the best version of oneself.
- Networking
- Sisterhood
- Self-assurance and financial independence

- Take advantage of fast track opportunities

Scope for future studies

Similar studies can be carried out for male professionals. In fact, comparisons can be made of similar stages in life. Specific lessons especially for corporates can be utilized to redefine policies separately for male and female employees to cater to their different needs and sensibilities. Further studies can include comparative case studies of companies – those where women professionals were/are more successful, especially after coming back after some career break vis a comparable company, where women were/are relatively less successful after coming back from a career break.

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