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## COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE: STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CAREER CHALLENGES AND ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Abstract:** *This comprehensive review investigates the multifaceted challenges and advancements related to women's career development across diverse cultural and organizational contexts. The analysis integrates findings from various studies, including those focused on Bangladesh, Italy, India, Spain, Brazil, and global surveys. The study considers the review from both the developed and underdeveloped countries. Key themes include the persistent impact of work-life balance, gender stereotypes, and barriers to leadership roles. Evidence from these studies highlights that while progress has been made in increasing women's representation in leadership and improving diversity and inclusion practices, significant barriers remain. These include gender biases, inadequate support for women re-entering the workforce, and the need for flexible work arrangements. Specific issues such as career advancement challenges and the influence of personal resilience are also examined. The review underscores the challenges faced by women globally and critical need for attention to be given to continued efforts in policy reform, organizational support, and educational advancements to address these challenges and foster an environment. Hence the study explains the needs of the women to achieve work life balance and equitable career progression from the reviews obtained from various studies*

**Keywords:** *gender equality, career development, work-life balance, diversity and inclusion, professional development, global workforce, cultural barriers, policy reform*

### 1. Introduction

The progression of women in the workforce has garnered significant attention over recent decades, highlighting both advancements and ongoing barriers. Despite notable increases in women's representation in

leadership roles and greater workforce participation globally, challenges persist, often rooted in entrenched gender stereotypes and systemic biases. Thus this study aims analyse the problems still pertaining globally to be treated with attention.

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Some of these were discussed in this study to torch the light on various cultural and organizational context, women continue to face substantial obstacles that affect their career advancement. Work-life balance remains a predominant issue, impacting women's ability to progress professionally while managing personal responsibilities. Studies across different regions, including Bangladesh, Italy, and India, reveal that these challenges are multifaceted, involving issues such as inadequate support systems, gender bias, and traditional cultural norms.

Recent studies and surveys from different cultural and organizational contexts shed light on the multifaceted nature of these challenges. For instance, the study in Bangladesh, women report that personal and household responsibilities substantially affect their job satisfaction and career growth. The one more study states that the women's career perception underscores the persistent struggle with work-life balance, where personal and household responsibilities significantly influence job satisfaction.

Similarly, in Italy, women in academia face structural barriers rooted in patriarchal norms, which hinder their advancement to senior positions. The other one reveals that, the under representation of women in senior academic positions in accounting reflects broader structural barriers, including outdated gender roles and inadequate institutional support. The experience of women re-entering the workforce after a career hiatus further emphasizes the need for specialized upskilling programs and organizational policies that support career continuity.

In India, the limited female workforce participation is influenced by deep-seated cultural expectations and inadequate institutional support.

A survey conducted by Hero Vired in India, with 200,000 women reveals that work-life balance is identified as a primary obstacle to career advancement, despite progress in

gender diversity and inclusion. This survey highlights the need for effective strategies to address ongoing issues such as pay disparities, career stagnation, and inadequate support for women returning to the workforce after a break.

Thus the study aims to understand the struggles for women career advancement prevailing in various regions and the policies implemented to overcome these from the understanding of the various researchers..

## **2. Literature review**

This research aims to explore these challenges and opportunities comprehensively, focusing on the impact of gender barriers and work-life balance on women's career advancement. By examining these issues across different regions and sectors, the study seeks to identify actionable strategies and policies that can enhance women's professional development and contribute to a more equitable work environment.

By addressing these challenges, the study reveals a comprehensive understanding of the various factors that impact women's careers, from societal expectations and workplace environments to individual resilience and support systems. By exploring these issues, this research aims to provide insights into effective strategies for overcoming barriers and fostering an equitable environment for women's career advancement.

Navigating the complexities of career advancement for women involves addressing a spectrum of challenges, prominently including gender barriers and work-life balance. Despite significant strides in gender equality and increased representation of women in leadership positions across various sectors, persistent obstacles continue to impede their career progression

## 2.1. Review of Literature from various regions and sectors

The study of Raihen et al. (2023), examines women's career perceptions and job satisfaction in Bangladesh, where workforce participation has risen but barriers persist. The study uses quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with professional women from various fields. Key topics include work-life balance, gender bias, educational background, workplace violence, family support, and job satisfaction.

Their findings reveal that while work-life balance has improved, challenges remain. For instance, 34.8% of women feel their jobs interfere with their studies, and 50.2% report that personal or household responsibilities affect their work. Job satisfaction among Bangladeshi female teachers is 60.3%. The study underscores the need for flexible work arrangements and support systems to enhance both family and professional roles.

The results indicate that factors like age, education, gender, and family support significantly impact job satisfaction. Addressing gender inequality and promoting women's empowerment is crucial for Bangladesh's economic growth and women's productivity.

Italian researchers Galizzi et al. (2024) reveal their views, women are less represented in senior accounting academia positions compared to other European countries and disciplines. This research investigates the barriers faced by Italian women in accounting academia and suggests ways to address them. Using a phenomenographic approach, the study examines the experiences of 24 women at various career levels, identifying 82 distinct barriers rooted in a patriarchal culture. Key barriers include challenges in work-life balance and traditional gender roles. The study advocates for a feminist restructuring of academic institutions, recommending actions such as combating gender stereotypes, supporting female leadership,

improving workplace conditions, and addressing career mechanisms. The findings highlight the need for a cultural shift within universities to achieve true gender equality.

Efforts of Spanish women to attain professional Development Martín-Peña et al. (2023), was investigated and explores alternative career paths using a multicriteria decision model. Based on a sample of Spanish women executives, the study identifies several scenarios influencing career choices:

- Professional Development
- Work Stability.
- Family Balance
- Balanced Approach
- Gender Equality Focus

The study finds that internal promotion is not a preferred career path for women, suggesting a need for organizations to address barriers to internal advancement. The research contributes to understanding the glass ceiling and offers empirical insights into gender-based career challenges. Recommendations include improving work-life balance policies, offering mentoring, and addressing biases to support women's career development and promote gender diversity in leadership roles.

Need for changes in prevailing Labour laws was studied by Kemechian et al. (2023), explores the major challenges faced by Brazilian women in STEM careers, both in Brazil and abroad, focusing on SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work). Using a mixed-methods approach, including content analysis and Grey Relational Analysis, the research identifies key difficulties such as a lack of flexible work systems, inadequate gender-sensitive policies, and traditional cultural models. Interviews with high-level professionals in multinational STEM companies revealed that Brazil lags behind in labour laws compared to countries like Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Switzerland, and the US.

The study also emphasizes the importance of discussing gender equality and decent work early in education to boost women's STEM participation. It highlights the need for improved labour policies and organizational cultures to better support women in balancing personal and professional lives. While optimistic about future progress, the study notes limitations such as a small sample size and suggests future research could explore additional SDGs, cultural contexts, and the impact of race and ethnicity.

Study about cultural based problem facing by Indian women were thrown light by Bongale & Sabanna (2023), came to know that there is only a limited role for women predominantly in domestic spheres. With a female work participation rate (FWPR) of 20%, significantly below the global average of 47%, this study explores factors hindering women's workforce participation in India. Using secondary data and a growth rate analysis, the study finds that FWPR has grown by 12.50%. Despite facing hurdles like exploitation and discrimination, women are increasingly striving for self-reliance and contributing financially to their families. However, challenges persist, particularly for illiterate and rural women, highlighting the need for improved governance, societal support, and personal empowerment.

Challenges because of position/post level studied by Mittal et al. (2015), highlights at the ministerial level, they encounter harsh treatment, extended working hours, limited leave, lower wages, and job insecurity. In middle management, balancing family commitments with job demands creates substantial difficulties. At the higher levels, women deal with increased responsibilities and complex tasks, often requiring flexible working hours. Common issues include persistent gender pay gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, inadequate maternity leave, and ineffective implementation of workplace protections. These challenges reflect broader cultural and structural problems that require policy

changes and cultural shifts to ensure gender equality and better support for women in the workforce.

Societal challenges relating to women were taken into consideration by Poovizhi & Chandrasekar (2016), thus Career development is a critical aspect of human growth that shapes a person's work identity throughout their life. For women in India, this process is fraught with challenges due to societal norms, cultural expectations, and institutional barriers. Career development for women involves navigating from initial career awareness to choosing a profession, obtaining necessary education and training, and advancing in their careers. Despite significant personal and professional hurdles, many women continue to strive for success. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from family, society, and government.

And the study suggested that the Governments should enhance training opportunities for women in leadership, assertiveness, and time management, and provide personal development avenues for managerial roles. They need to promote the appointment of women managers based on merit and potential, and invest in resources for training and development. Additionally, flexible working hours, day care centres, and high-paying part-time jobs should be introduced to support women balancing career and family responsibilities. Dual-career families should be given workplace flexibility, and equal educational opportunities must be ensured for both genders. Society and governments should also foster an environment where women are encouraged to take on challenging roles and are not discriminated against based on gender. By implementing these measures, women can better compete with their male counterparts and achieve career advancement in a supportive environment.

Prevailing Working environment needs changes was highlighted by Koekemoer et al. (2023), Research on women's career

success often highlights career barriers but overlooks personal resources that contribute to success. This study investigates the role of resilience and grit in the relationship between women's person-environment fit and career success. Using a survey of 408 female employees and structural equation modeling, results showed positive links between person-environment fit, resilience, and grit, which explained a large variance in subjective career success. While resilience and grit mediated this relationship, they did not moderate it. The findings suggest that resilience and grit indirectly enhance career success but do not buffer against poor fit.

Re-entry after pregnancy is crucial for women globally spotted by Cryshal, et al. (2023), this study examines the challenges women face when re-entering the IT sector and identifies support factors that could ease their transition. A survey of 122 women revealed that lack of job opportunities, flexible working hours, and confidence are major barriers. Training in self-presentation and networking are key support factors. The study emphasizes the need for organizational policies promoting gender diversity, family support, and public policy interventions to improve re-entry outcomes. Although limited to IT in Karnataka, the study suggests expanding research to other Indian IT hubs for broader insights.

Scope for career advancement reviewed by Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2003, explores the challenges women face in advancing to leadership positions, focusing on gender biases and stereotypes, both external and internal. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, conscious and unconscious biases still persist in organizations, making it difficult for women to take on leadership roles. Internalized stereotypes can also limit women's confidence, hindering their career growth. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing these biases, supporting women through organizational policies, and encouraging women to overcome self-doubt and pursue leadership roles confidently.

Focusing on rural women Deepika (2022), analyzes the career advancement challenges faced by rural women in India, based on data from 110 respondents in three villages. Using statistical tools like chi-square and Spearman's rho correlation with SPSS, the study reveals that rural women often face significant obstacles such as early marriage, lack of financial support, and peer pressure. Self-motivation also emerged as a critical factor hindering career growth. The study highlights that societal expectations and traditional roles limit women's career opportunities. Recommendations include increasing awareness, providing guidance, and implementing supportive policies to help rural women advance in their careers.

Gender stereotype perception was examined by Tabassum & Nayak (2021), shows that how gender stereotypes perpetuate discrimination against women in management roles. It argues that contemporary management practices often ignore social theories of gender studies, which could otherwise help develop gender-neutral managerial strategies. By analyzing different aspects of gender stereotyping, the paper highlights how these stereotypes affect women's career progressions and outlines the theoretical shifts from "Women in Management" to "Women and Management" and finally to "Gender and Management." Despite progress in management literature, gender stereotypes persist, influenced by individual, family, socio-cultural, and organizational factors. The paper calls for a deeper integration of critical gender theories into management practices to address these enduring issues and improve women's career advancement.

Problems of women with outdated skill at the time of re-entry was discussed by Basu, (2024, March 7), Challenges include re-entering the workforce after a hiatus, with issues such as outdated skills and finding suitable jobs. However, the report notes progress in diversity and inclusion, with 77% of respondents observing increased female representation in leadership roles and 59%

believing in equal opportunities for women. Despite this, biases persist, including pay disparities and limited growth opportunities. The report advocates for specialized upskilling programs, with 55% of respondents supporting such initiatives for women returning from career breaks.

### **3. Discussion and analysis**

Organizational policies must be rescheduled for women to balance their responsibilities with personal and family commitments affect women's career advancement.

Organizations should be cultured to break the barriers of women face in the workplace, including systemic biases, gender stereotypes, and lack of representation in leadership roles.

Measures to be taken to increase the accessibility and effectiveness of up skilling programs for women, especially those returning to the workforce after a break will lead to up skilling in mitigating career stagnation and advancing women's careers.

Frequent evaluation of the progress of diversity and inclusion initiatives in organizations and their impact on improving career opportunities for women will bring changes in their work atmosphere

Government has to reconstruct the labour laws to bring changes among the organizations and to increase the participation of women in various sectors to increase national productivity.

### **4. Conclusion**

This research underscores that, despite notable progress in female representation in leadership and an increased focus on diversity and inclusion, many obstacles persist that hinder women's full participation and success in the workforce.

The evidence reveals that work-life balance is a primary concern, with many women struggling to reconcile professional demands

with personal and family responsibilities. The existing organizational practices, though improving, often fall short in adequately addressing these challenges. Flexible work arrangements, supportive workplace policies, and family-friendly practices are crucial in enabling women to thrive professionally while managing their personal lives.

Gender-specific barriers, including systemic biases and stereotypical expectations, continue to obstruct women's career progression. Despite advancements in diversity initiatives, deeply ingrained cultural and institutional practices still perpetuate these barriers. The effectiveness of these initiatives in creating tangible changes in career opportunities for women requires ongoing scrutiny and refinement.

Upskilling and professional development play a pivotal role in overcoming career stagnation and fostering advancement. However, barriers such as limited access to upskilling opportunities and time constraints for women, particularly those returning to the workforce, highlight the need for more accessible and targeted professional development programs.

Cultural and institutional factors, including governmental policies and societal attitudes, significantly influence women's career opportunities. Addressing these factors requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including employers, policymakers, and societal leaders, to create an environment where women can advance on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

In conclusion, while strides have been made in promoting gender equality in the workplace, substantial work remains to ensure that women can fully realize their career potential. Addressing work-life balance, overcoming gender-specific barriers, and enhancing upskilling opportunities are critical steps towards achieving a more equitable and supportive professional environment for women.

## 5. Recommendations for future works

Recommendations are:

- Identify gaps in the current literature and propose areas for further research to better understand and address gender barriers and work-life balance issues.
- Suggest potential new methodologies or approaches to studying these topics to enhance the effectiveness of career advancement strategies for women.
- Future research should focus on the inter-section of gender with other factors such as race, socio-economic status, and educational background to provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's career experiences.

## 6. Limitations

The comprehensive review may be limited by the availability and scope of existing literature, potentially missing recent studies or emerging trends that could provide additional insights into women's career advancement challenges.

The literature reviewed may primarily focus on specific regions or cultural contexts, which might not fully represent the global diversity of women's experiences and work place challenges.

The study highlights only the common problems faced by women in their regular work faces were discussed it does not insight into the specific problems of women in various work culture.

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