

Factors effecting career progression of women executives in service sector of India

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Abstract

Purpose- The aim of the study is to identify the factors effecting career progression of women executives in service sector of India.

Research Methodology- This study is utilizing a descriptive and exploratory research design. Four hundred women executives were surveyed from service sectors of India. A five point likert scale of 25 statements was used to collect data from women executives of various service sector organizations. Exploratory Factor analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were applied.

Findings- The findings indicate that women have to face major hindrances during their career growth. The findings underscore the critical role of organizational support, career aspirations, cultural norms, family dynamics, mentorship, and policy sensitivity in shaping women's career. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering gender-inclusive environments and devising effective interventions to propel women's advancement in career progression.

Managerial Implications- Organizations can develop policies to reduce systemic biasness in different sectors and promote development of female employees. Organizations can design their training programs for developing leadership traits among female employees. Managers should provide continual training to the female employees for preparing them for future challenges.

Keywords: Career Progression, Managerial Aspirations, Organisation Culture, Insensitive Policies, Gender Diversity.

Paper Type- Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Career is the series of person's educational pursuits, unpaid, and paid jobs. The term career progression referred to the professional achievements of an employee. The career growth of employees is a crucial aspect of inclusive workforce and organizational success. Female employee's career growth is an important element of societal progress and organizational success. Over the last decade, there has been remarkable change towards recognizing the professional growth of female employees in the workforce. Despite gender equality, female employees have encountered discriminatory practices and systemic biases that decelerate their professional growth. The discriminatory practices such as limited access to leadership roles, stereotypical perceptions, and unequal pay, can impede female employees capabilities

(Laxshmidēvi & Geetha, 2024). Obstacles such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and work-family conflict, significantly thwart women's career advancement. Similarly persistence of masculine organizational cultures, organizational values, societal norms and the prevalence of internal networking issues have an effect on women's career progression (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010). All these combined challenges result in an invisible barrier referred as glass ceiling. This term was first used in an article of wall street journal in 1986 that identified this unseen barrier hindering female employees from reaching the top managerial positions in different sectors. It reveals those discriminatory practices that obstruct women from climbing up high managerial positions only because they are females (Babic & Hansez, 2021). The prospective of organizational leadership has made progress over the past decades, yet women continue to face major obstacles to achieve top leadership positions across various industries. Regardless of women's representation in workforce and gender equality, "glass ceiling"—an invisible barriers that prevent women from being promoted to upper level positions (Tyagi, 2024).

Review of Literature

Zhong (2006) identified major barriers to women's growth and development in leadership, including the work-family conflict, glass ceiling, sexual harassment, and organizational culture. Recent researches emphasize that enhancing women's career progression in the service sector is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic business imperative (Smith et al., 2023). However, societal expectations and stereotypes frequently undermine leadership qualities of female employees, and it can hinder career progression- of women (Meenal, 2016). Additionally, the unsupportive organizational cultures, and the scarcity of training and mentoring opportunities, heightened the difficulties faced by women in ascending to leadership positions (Geigner & Crow, 2014). The struggle for gender parity in leadership exhibit differently for different cultural context. Furthermore, organizational policies and support structures, such as equal pay practices, work-life balance practices, gender quotas, and quota recruitment initiatives, are important for encouraging gender equality in the workplace. Organizations implementing such policies tend to have a higher representation of women in leadership positions (Davis & Patel, 2022). Societal and cultural norms also impact women's career advancement and changing societal attitudes playing a critical role in reshaping workplace dynamics (Johnson et al., 2023). Despite gender equality initiatives, organizational leadership remains a significant challenge for female employees worldwide.

Jogulu and Wood (2008) noted that women's leadership is influenced by the beliefs, values, and attitudes, with female managers often perceived differently in terms of leadership effectiveness. In male-dominated environments, due to masculine organizational cultures, and internal networking issues, which significantly effect their career advancement (Ogden, 2008). Inclusive organizational policies, such as parental leave, anti-harassment policies, and flexible working arrangements can significantly enhance job satisfaction among female employees and career progression (Ali & Knox, 2020). Women often show more interpersonal relationships with subordinates compared to their male counterparts, still more than fifty percent of women leaders perceive barriers to entering management positions (Elmuti & Davis, 2009). Education and training are seen as crucial for leadership roles of women. Women do not need to imitate male leadership styles to succeed, as women have their own effective traits of leadership. However, modesty in women can impact their remuneration and career progression (Budworth & Mann, 2010). Gender bias continues to be a substantial barrier to women's progression in the service sector. Traditionally men dominated sectors are still often perceive women

as less competent or less suited for leadership roles (Williams et al., 2022). Biasness is reinforced by gender stereotypes, who relate leadership qualities with masculinity, resulting in less opportunities for women's development (Heilman et al., 2022). Women are frequently evaluated more critically than their male counterparts, affecting their chances of promotion and career growth (Nguyen & Cohen, 2023). Change in organizational culture can help women in breaking the glass ceiling for top management positions. Gender biased culture can negatively affect female employees performance due to lack of supportive environments (Akindele, 2011). Okafor et al. (2011) identified barriers such as limited training opportunities, low aspirations, gender biasness, and lack of mentoring as significant hindrances in women's advancement to top management. Indian women are challenged traditional roles and establishing themselves as effective leaders (Mittal, 2014). Ademe and Singh (2015) highlighted conducive working environment, self-confidence, assertiveness, and networking opportunities as critical factors for women's leadership, while patriarchy, stereotyping, low academic qualifications, and lack of support from colleagues and society were major barriers.

Evans (2015) emphasized that women should embrace their unique leadership styles instead of emulate masculine leadership characteristics, noting that social, political, and economic environments have hindered women's leadership aspirations. Krinzman (2015) found that women are inadequately representing in management positions, with few top leadership roles. Datta and Agarwal (2017) noted that women anticipate more career barriers than men, with supervisory support being significant for leadership behavior. Indian women leaders face societal and workplace discrimination, due to stereotype thinking of society, which complicates their leadership journeys (Saifuddin, 2017).

Sharjeet et al. (2017) examined the glass ceiling's impact on the selection and promotion of female candidates, finding it affects both female advancement and their effectiveness. Stavroula et al. (2017) identified common barriers like gender gaps, lack of career advancement opportunities, stereotypes, work-life balance issues, lack of mentoring, and inflexible environments, effects women career advancement differently in different industries. Gangadharan et al. (2018) observed that female leaders behave more strategically and opportunistically than men, especially when their gender is publicly revealed, indicating the influence of social expectations. Studies indicated that digital tools and remote work options have created more flexible work environments, and it highlighted a skill gap among female employees, particularly in techno-driven roles (Garcia & Roberts, 2023). Promoting the career advancement of women in service sector is seen as a strategic move toward achieving more sustainable and climate-resilient practices. The key challenge remains to identify the factors contributing to the slow progress of female employees in top management. Given the limited literature from the perspective of women leaders, this review attempts to reflect their voices and views on career progression barriers and opportunities.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of this paper provides a comprehensive overview of the methods and techniques employed to identify and investigate the factor effecting career progression of women executives in India's service sector.

Objective of the Study

To identify the factors effecting career progression of women executives in service sector of India.

Research Design

The study employs an exploratory research design, focusing on women executives working in various

organisations of service sectors of India.

Sampling Design and Sample Size

The research involves a sample drawn from five different service sectors viz: education, health, banking insurance and IT. Disproportionate random sampling technique was used as 80 women executives each from these five sectors making total sample size of 400 were selected as respondents for this study. Out of four hundred, 365 responses were found fit for the study.

Instrument

A self-structured questionnaire having five point likert scale was used to collect data from the women executives. All twenty five statements of questionnaire were coded as from CPW1 to CPW25.

Data Analysis

EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) and CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) have been used for analysis of data.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.831
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		10491.053
	Df		300
	Sig.		.000

Sources: Primary Data

The Table 1 shows that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy is 0.831, indicating that the sample is adequate for conducting factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity has a Chi-Square value of 10491.053 with 300 degrees of freedom and a significance level (Sig.) of 0.000, suggesting that the correlations between items are sufficiently large for applying exploratory factor analysis (Surucu et al., 2022).

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor	Item Code	Factor Loading	Communalities	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
Organisational Encouragement	CPW2	.938	.893	6.660	26.641
	CPW3	.909	.859		
	CPW4	.904	.866		
	CPW6	.881	.821		
	CPW1	.809	.709		
	CPW5	.797	.685		
Masculine Culture	CPW7	.933	.899	4.614	18.457
	CPW8	.910	.861		
	CPW10	.909	.862		
	CPW9	.897	.794		
	CPW11	.794	.688		
Managerial	CPW13	.936	.912	3.466	13.865

Aspirations	CPW16	.929	.908		
	CPW15	.900	.844		
	CPW12	.825	.737		
	CPW14	.805	.678		
Family Support	CPW19	.913	.908	2.410	9.639
	CPW18	.890	.896		
	CPW17	.849	.765		
Insensitive Policy	CPW20	.937	.924	1.724	6.895
	CPW21	.937	.916		
	CPW22	.735	.556		
Mentoring	CPW24	.846	.803	1.475	5.901
	CPW25	.815	.831		
	CPW23	.775	.735		

Source: Primary Data

Out of twenty five items, six factors were extracted from twenty five items which are named as Organisational Encouragement, Masculine Culture, Managerial Aspirations, Family Support, Insensitive Policy, Mentoring.

Factor 1: Organisational Encouragement

Organisational encouragement is the first factor which includes six items i.e., “I like how my company appreciates women to assume leadership positions by offering them challenging assignments (CPW2), I believe the organization's human resources policy is just and provides everyone with an equal opportunity to advance within the company on the basis of merit (CPW3), In order for me to pursue advancement, I would like the company implement family-friendly policies like crèches, boarding schools, and senior care facilities (CPW4), I think that the pay system, which is based on "equal pay for equal labor," motivates me to pursue advancement (CPW6), I favor organizations that assist women in integrating their many responsibilities and bringing themselves together (CPW1), In the specialized training programme for female managers, I learn better (CPW5)”. The range of factor loading vary from .797 to .938 and explained variance is 26.641. All the values lies in the minimum acceptable criteria.

Factor 2: Masculine Culture

Masculine culture is the second factor which includes five items i.e., “The organizational structure, in my observation, favors male hierarchy (CPW7), I feel, the organization's bureaucratic structure is indifferent to the really distinct demands of women managers (CPW8), I think, my desire to pursue advancement is stifled by the aggressive leadership styles promoted by the male culture (CPW10), I encounter the normal masculine opposition in informal networks (CPW9), I believe that male superiors are favored by subordinates and colleagues than female superiors, which inhibited me from pursuing advancement (CPW11)”. The range of factor loading vary from .794 to .933, and explained variance is 18.457. All the values lies in the minimum acceptable criteria.

Factor 3: Managerial Aspiration

Managerial aspiration is the third factor which includes five items i.e., “I believe I have the same potential as males to hold high managerial positions (CPW13), Within the next five years, I hope to hold a position of more significance (CPW16), Regarding professional recognition, I believe my goals

are very high (CPW15), I am trying to developed a working style that will suits superiors (CPW12), I look for alternatives to develop managerial experience (CPW14)". The range of factor loading vary from .805 to .936, and explained variance is 13.865. All the values lies in the minimum acceptable criteria.

Factor 4: Family Support

Family support is the fourth factor which includes three items i.e., "My supporting spouse, I believe, is a terrific facilitator for my professional development (CPW19), I believe having a family or non-family caregiver available is a tremendous facilitator for work advancement (CPW18), My family gives ample support to balance work and family obligations (CPW17)". The range of factor loading vary from .849 to .913, and explained variance is 9.639. All the values lies in the minimum acceptable criteria.

Factor 5: Insensitive Policy

Insensitive policy is the fifth factor which includes three items i.e., "I believe that the transfer-related promotion policy discourages women from pursuing promotions (CPW20), Compensatory offs seem to be used more in rule books than in actual practise, in my opinion (CPW21), Despite being legal, I believe that maternity leave is seen as a negative for the company since it permits extended absences from the workplace (CPW22)". The range of factor loading vary from .735 to .937, and explained variance is 6.895. All the values lies in the minimum acceptable criteria.

Factor 6: Mentoring

Mentoring is the sixth factor which includes three items i.e., "To assist me in planning my career, I search for mentors within the company (CPW24), I am appreciative for the informal mentors who have helped me develop the necessary abilities to take on more responsibility in my life (CPW25), I suggest that the company should implement a structured mentorship programme (CPW23)". The range of factor loading vary from .775 to .846, and explained variance is 5.901. All the values lies in the minimum acceptable criteria.

Organizational Encouragement (OE) have consistently shown its critical role in fostering a supportive work environment, which enhances employee motivation and job satisfaction. The high loadings of OE indicators in this study corroborate these findings, emphasizing the importance of organizational support mechanisms. Managerial Aspirations (MA) have been extensively linked to career advancement and leadership development in prior research (Tharenou, 2001). The strong loadings of MA indicators in this analysis highlight the significance of aspirations in shaping managerial potential and career trajectories. Similarly, the concept of Masculine Culture (MC) and its implications for workplace dynamics have been well-documented, particularly in studies addressing gender diversity and inclusion. The findings reflect this, with high loadings for MC indicators suggesting that masculine cultural norms remain a salient factor in organizational contexts. Family Support (FS) has been identified as a crucial element in work-life balance literature, influencing employee well-being and productivity (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The significant loadings of FS indicators in this study reinforce the critical role of family support in professional settings. Mentoring (MT) has also been countered as a vital component of career development, offering guidance and support to less experienced employees. The loadings for MT indicators in this analysis underscore its importance in professional growth and development. Insensitive Policies (IP) have been recognized in previous studies as detrimental to employee morale and engagement (Eisenberger et al., 2001). The findings,

with strong loadings for IP indicators, suggest that such policies continue to impact employee perceptions negatively. This pattern of loadings across components validates the constructs' relevance and supports the robustness of our findings in understanding the different dimensions of organizational dynamics.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA has been used to validate the scale of Career Progression. AMOS 26 is used to construct model. The rectangles represent the measured variables while ovals represent the latent variables. Correlation between variables are shown by double headed arrows. Figure 1 represents the Path diagram of factor effecting career progression. Total number of variables are twenty five and these have been segregated in six factors namely organizational encouragement, masculine culture, managerial aspiration, family support, insensitive policy, and mentoring.

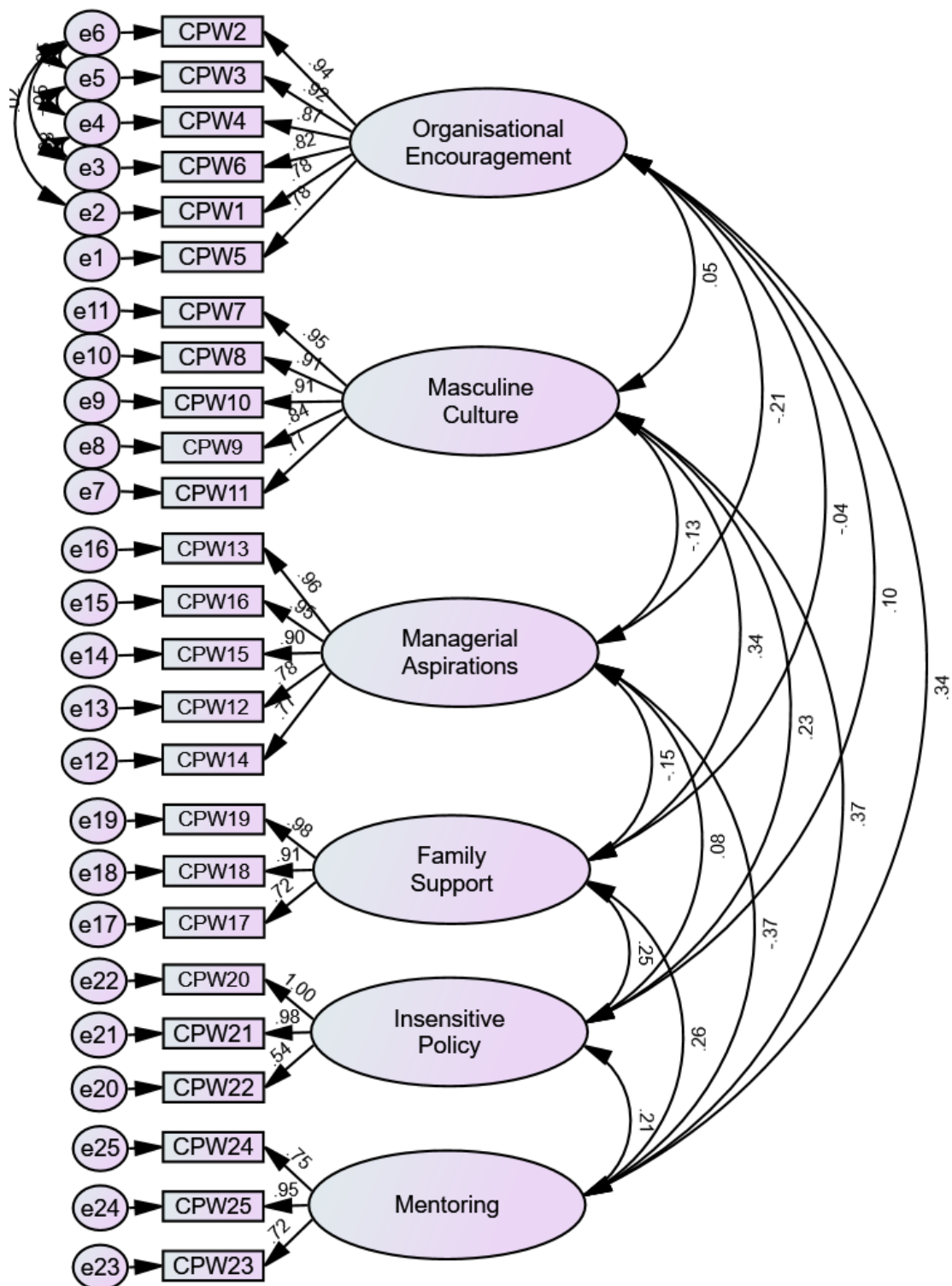


Figure 1: Factors effecting Career Progression

Structural model fit

Table 3 represent the overall fit results using confirmatory factor analysis. It shows that cmin/df score is within acceptable limits (below 5). The GFI score is above 0.80 threshold limit, NFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI score is above 0.90 threshold limit. The RMSEA value is below 0.1 threshold limit (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 3: Structural model fit indices

Indices	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	GFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Default Value	989.111	255	.000	3.879	.851	.908	.930	.917	.930	.085
Cut off Criteria	-	-	<.05	<5	>.800	>.800	>.800	>.800	>.800	<.10

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 shows the various model fit indices. CMIN is 989.111 for the present structural model with the degrees of freedom 255 and probability value of .000. CMIN/DF is 3.879 which less than .5 (maximum acceptable value of model fit). All goodness of fit indices i.e., GFI (.851), NFI (.908), IFI (.930), TLI (.917) & CFI (.930) are greater than .80 (minimum acceptable value of) (Hair et al.2014) which indicate the better fit. RMSEA value is .085 which indicate the excellent fitness of the model.

Table 4: Standardized Regression Weights

Table 4 shows the standardized regression weight.

	Estimate
CPW5 <--- Organisational Encouragement	.775
CPW1 <--- Organisational Encouragement	.776
CPW6 <--- Organisational Encouragement	.823
CPW4 <--- Organisational Encouragement	.865
CPW3 <--- Organisational Encouragement	.921
CPW2 <--- Organisational Encouragement	.935
CPW11 <--- Masculine Culture	.767
CPW9 <--- Masculine Culture	.836
CPW10 <--- Masculine Culture	.911
CPW8 <--- Masculine Culture	.912
CPW7 <--- Masculine Culture	.950
CPW14 <--- Managerial Aspirations	.767
CPW12 <--- Managerial Aspirations	.781
CPW15 <--- Managerial Aspirations	.898
CPW16 <--- Managerial Aspirations	.947
CPW13 <--- Managerial Aspirations	.956
CPW17 <--- Family Support	.725
CPW18 <--- Family Support	.915
CPW19 <--- Family Support	.978
CPW22 <--- Insensitive Policy	.545

	Estimate
CPW21 <--- Insensitive Policy	.977
CPW20 <--- Insensitive Policy	1.003
CPW23 <--- Mentoring	.719
CPW25 <--- Mentoring	.947
CPW24 <--- Mentoring	.752

Source: Primary Data

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the factors effecting women's career progression in India's service sector. The identified factors—Organizational Encouragement, Managerial Aspirations, Masculine Culture, Family Support, Mentoring, and Insensitive Policies—underscore the complex interplay of organizational dynamics, societal expectations, and individual aspirations shaping women's career trajectories. Addressing these factors necessitates concerted efforts from organizational leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to create gender-inclusive environments, provide mentorship opportunities, and enact supportive policies. By navigating these obstacles and fostering an environment conducive to women's leadership development, organizations can unlock the full potential of their female workforce and drive sustainable growth and innovation.

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