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CONSTRAINED BY CHOICE – AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CHALLENGING BARRIERS OF WOMEN IN WORKFORCE

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ABSTRACT

The status of women in modern India is a sort of paradox. If on one side she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand, she is mutely suffering the barriers afflicted. As compared with past, women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality, they have to still travel a long way. Some researchers had focused on differences on career progress of women, identifying reasons like less education, seniority, training and experience. Some studies have also indicated that the women managers are confronted with structural barriers. In career choices women tend to be in stereotypically feminine professions and reflect lower levels of career aspirations, educational attainment, and career achievement compared with those of men in the same intellectual level. Although women's labour force participation still differs greatly from men, mainly because of socio - economic disadvantages.

This research article aims to study the choices of women in different milestones of her life and the road blocks faced at every stage, with the success or the failure factor which necessitated the decision. An empirical study has been conducted among the married working mothers' women in academia to identify the above said factors influencing the choices of women. A sample size of 125 was selected using convenience sampling technique. The primary data was collected using questionnaire. The choices of women at every stage were studied and the factors influencing both supportive as well as those acting as barriers were studied. The influence of the demographic factors on the choices of women is also revealed using the analysis of variance tool. Factors like education level of the parent, income level of the family, rural or the urban background, were studied and the results proved that there is significant difference in the choices women make because of the above said factors. The suggestions and the conclusion have been derived from the findings of the study is enumerated in detail in the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Women today expect to work after they complete their education, the higher the education level the more likely the women are to be employed. This increased commitment to career and therefore postponement of marriage and child bearing and to a decrease in the number of children born to educated women (Betz, 1993; Spain & Bianchi, 1996) Women evaluate the combination of wife, mother, and career as the most attractive role option. (Bridges, 1987).

The choices, women make in life are influenced by personal, organizational and societal realities. Based on these multiple influences over time, a woman is likely to experience transitions. These transitions reflect the complex choices, and the path she travels for the rest of her lifetime. (Baber & Monaghan, 1988; Bielby & Bielby, 1984; Granrose & Kaplan 1996).

As a girl develops into women her values, attitudes and behavior are shaped. She is responsible to shape her identity and this can be a challenge, as well as finding access to education and employment to provide her with a level of independence. Every choice women undertake in each stage of life is a challenge.

A contemporary woman wants to have it all. Education, Career, Marriage and Motherhood with no compromises. However the road leading to these is not smooth. Women have left a secured domain of their home and are now in the battle field of life, fully charged with talent. But in India, they are yet to get the dues. Research by Harlon and Berheide (1994) observed that sex-segregated jobs, holding jobs in lower position and lack of job ladders are major factors for women's under representation at all levels in the organisation.

However many studies have concluded that career orientation and motherhood expectations seem to exist in separate spheres. Once they did have a child the women expect anticipate long maternity leave and subsequent part time employment. Similarly Schroeder, Blood, and Maluso (1992) found that in their studies women who planned to have both career and family yet they expected to place family ahead of career demands.

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the various factors influencing the various choices women make in her life
- To assess the magnitude of the factors in influencing the choices
- To investigate the interrelationship among the barriers
- To provide suggestions

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

The National Census Report 2011, reports the growth rate of Indian population is 1.5% comprising 655 million males and 615 million females. Among 1.25 billion people only 28 million are employed and 39 million are unemployed. Although with the increase in schools and colleges there has been subsequent decline in the proportion of youth in labor force, unemployment would still remain a matter of concern in India for years to come. (Census, 2011).

Participation of Women in Economy

In India, females have a share of 48.1% in the urban population of 48.6 % in rural population. In the urban sector out of the total of 56.97 million households 4.85 million 10.9 % are female headed. Literacy rate in India in 2011 increased by 8% to 73%. While male literacy rate stands at 80.9%, 5.6 % more than the previous census and female literacy rate stands at 64.6 % an increase of 10.9% than 2001. The gap between literacy rate in urban and rural areas is steadily declining in every census. The work force participation rate of females in rural sector was 26.1 % in 2009 -10 while that for males was 54.7%. In the urban sector it was 13.8% for females and 54.3% for males. A total of 20.4 % women were employed in the organized sector in 2010 with 17.9 % working in public sector and 24.5 % in the private.

The labor force participation rate of women across all age groups was 20.8 % in rural and 12.8 % in urban sector compared with men 54.8 % and 55.6 % for men in the rural and urban sector respectively. Of the total seekers registered with employment exchange women constituted 32.5% in 2009. The female share of total central government employment stood at 10% in 2009 in scheduled commercial bank was 16.6 % in 2010.

(Source: National Statistical Organization, Central Statistical office, Ministry of statistics and program implementation Government of India).

Labor force participation rates by the National sample survey office (NSSO) for women and men from 2009-10 is 15 % and 60.4% respectively. Estimates for 2009 - 10 from NSSO for the workforce participation rate WPR for urban women was 13.8% while for urban men it was 54.3%. This massive difference between the two is a matter of concern.

(Source: Govt. of India, Economic Survey 2011 -12 New Delhi -2011).

Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu's population is 72,147,030 of which 80.1% were literate in 2011 census, which includes 36,137,975 males and 36,009,055 females (Tamil Nadu Census Operation). The effective literacy rate in Tamil Nadu work out to 80.1 % with male literacy rate of 86.8 % and female literacy of 73.4%.

Out of the total population of Tamil Nadu 48.40 % people live in urban regions. The total figures of population living in urban are 34,917,440 of which 17,458,910 are males and while remaining 17,458,530 are females. Average literacy rate in Tamil Nadu for urban region was 87.4 % in which males were 91.80% literate while female literacy stood at 82.31 %. The total literates in urban region of TN were 27,335,312 in 2011 census.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design applied in the study is Descriptive Research Design. It is appropriate to use this method as this research describes the relationship among different variables consisting of causes and its influence on the choices women make in life. It tries to understand the extent of the role of different variables which acts as barriers towards the choice of alternatives which determines milestones of women life. Both primary and secondary data are used in this study to attain the objectives. The first-hand information for the study was collected from respondents regarding demographic variables, opinion on barriers that influence the choices. The secondary data includes information with reference to the women population, their respective literacy rate and labour force participation, previous studies related with barriers in making choices in women's life.

Structured questionnaire is used for gathering data from respondents for the study. A set of questions pertaining to the objectives of the study has been identified and adapted with the help of previous studies for the selected variables. It consists of both qualitative and quantitative items. The questions comprise multiple choice type and different kinds of scales are used to measure respective variables. It is tested using pilot survey among 30 selective respondents and Cronbach's Alpha is calculated for all variables that used scale. Baring a few variables, all others have scored more than 0.8 which is considered to be acceptable. Moreover, the changes mentioned by respondents during pilot study and opinion of experts are incorporated before making final draft of questionnaire. Initially with 50 samples using final questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to confirm reliability before making full-fledged survey and the reliability was found to be 0.9. As the population size is very large, sampling technique is applied to conduct this study. In this study, convenience sampling technique is adopted for selecting sample units. In this study, population refers to women employees in academic field located in Chennai city. Sample unit of this study is only married employed academician in Chennai city.

Variables considered in this study

The variables in this study are categorized as demographic factors, Personal barriers, Organizational barriers, and societal barriers influencing the choices of women.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Career oriented and Family oriented Choices:

Balancing career and family involves several important components. First there is the career component which is affected by what careers women choose (traditional and nontraditional and how the careers are pursued (long term, full time commitment or contingency fashion). Second there is the marriage component, which is determined by when and where women marry and what division of labour they establish in their marriage. Hallett and Gilbert (1997) found that career oriented women expected more role sharing in their marriages than did family oriented women. Third, there is the motherhood component which is influenced by when and how many children women have. Regardless of education or employment, nearly all women want to have children but educated women wait longer, which may lead to lower fertility rates (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Fourth there is the attitude component different attitudes towards women roles and responsibilities influence career and family. Long range work and family plans have considerable impact on subsequent behavior (Hoffnung, 1992; Rexroat & Shehan, 1984). Demographic factors also influence the ways in which individuals learn to navigate the career family dilemma. The rising significance of career in women lives requires that we look more closely at the priorities assigned to work and family roles, rather than relying on the distinction between traditional and nontraditional occupations. Cinamon and Rich (2002) assessed the importance of work, spousal and parental roles in the lives of married and employed professional women.

Personal Barriers

Self-image and confidence: It is logical to argue that poor self-image the women have of themselves is not something they were born with it is a point of view they were culturally educated to respect and uphold. A woman behaves in a certain way because she is brought up to believe that society expects her to behave that way (Liewellyn - Jones 199:15) Self-concept is a direct consequence of the developmental processes and experiences she had encountered or was exposed to or had interacted with various elements that constitute the environment in which the person is living. Confidence drives performance where there is no confidence there is no hope, faith, positive assertiveness and the will to

do anything. Thus performance can be used as a yard stick to measure women's confidence and willingness to take up positions of leadership or deny them on the basis of their gender. This notion as women having less confidence instead of ending innocently have unfortunately developed into powerful voices as women fear competition, women lack vision (Lewis 1992:83).

Organizational Barriers:

Discrimination: Morgan, King and Robinson (1981) discrimination refers to the behavior of treating a person or group in an unfavorable way or unfair way. Women as people of the weaker sex are often the ones most likely not to react when discriminated against for fear of being harnessed or further victimized. Ouston (1993) says men are still the prime barrier to women is right. Discrimination against women that is based on grounds and perceptions no doubt constitutes fairness (Dowling 1995). In a supporting case Baxter (2001) women in many industries are demonstrating greater aptitude for multiple skills and also appear comfortable for multitasking. Thus the business of women as Blanchard & Blanchard (1984) the differential stability in males and females has been interpreted as traditional sex role that aggressive behavior in a boy is accepted and even positively valued whereas such behavior is discouraged in girls.

Coworker support: Common barriers faced by women include inadequate occupational skills to compete with men. Findings from recent studies revealed that females showed an interest in great number of careers and exhibited more gender role flexibility in their aspirations than males (Francis, 2002). Women face a higher degree of struggle organizations among her co-workers with her determined effort dedication and courage she endures and wage before she could make it to the top position.

Societal Barriers:

Familial Obligations: The presence of children and stage of children influence the choices women make in life. Not only do children require a great deal of time and effort but women leave the labor market when having children and while children are young (O’Connell, Betz, and Kurth, 1989).

Culture: Linton (1964) in his research for women to prosper society must do more to unshackle them from traditional beliefs , prejudices, stereotypes and biases that still regards women as inferior being fit only to stay at homes as housewives and mother. Torington & Weightman (1989) reveals in this research and assumes men and women have different career paths and also differ in their perceptions.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

T – test is applied to study whether there is significant difference in the choices what women make who come from rural and urban background. The results are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1- T test for Nativity and Choices

Choice	Nativity	T	Sig
Educational choice	Rural	-4.327	0.000
	Urban		
Career choice	Rural	-3.996	0.000
	Urban		
Marriage choice	Rural	-3.622	0.000
	Urban		
Motherhood	Rural	-3.658	0.000
	Urban		

Choices of women have been divided into four dimension categories of educational choice, career choice, marriage choice and motherhood choice. The respondents' background is categorized into rural and urban. All the four dimensions of women choices are having significant difference between the two factors of rural and urban. It has been observed that choices of women are affected for those who hail from rural background.

Analysis of Variance: ANOVA test is applied to study the significant difference between the study variables. The education level of the parents and the choice of women are subjected to analysis. The table values indicate that the education level of the parent does influence the choices of women. ANOVA is applied to study significant difference in the choice with respect to the income level of the family. This is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2-Influence of Education of parents, Community, and Family Income on Choice for Women.

Variables	Education of the parents		Community		Family Income	
	F	Sig	F	Sig	F	Sig
Educational choice	3.945	.020*	5.241	.001*	2.912	.021*
Career choice	1.471	.231	3.580	.014*	3.366	.010*
Marriage choice	2.161	.116	3.541	.015*	7.690	.000*
Motherhood choice	3.000	.050*	4.106	.007*	5.496	.000*

*Significant at .05

The table shows that there is a significant difference in the choices because of the background.

The table values indicate that there is significant difference in the choices of women due to the family income.

FINDINGS

As indicated in the study women contribute equal proportion in the workforce participation of the country. Her life is filled with choices and decisions she has to make at every stage of her life. The study has identified the road blocks towards her decisions and categorized into three barriers namely Personal, Organizational, and Societal Barriers.

All the three barriers are not independent they are interrelated as all the choices are subject to influence and are having significant impact on the choices of women. Women whose parents are educated have a difference in the choice than whose parents are not highly educated. The urban and rural locality also influences the choices what women make in her milestones of life. The income of the family influence the choices of women is understood in the study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A convenience sampling plan was used consisting of women from academic field in Chennai city only. Therefore the findings cannot be generalized to women from other sectors and women in other parts of the country.

The fact that the data collected from the respondents were self-reported itself poses as a limitation. There is a possibility that the respondents might exaggerate or hide the information in the survey.

Another concern is the social desirability, the tendency for a respondent to choose the socially desirable and acceptable response compromising on the accuracy of the results.

One other limitation of this study is that it is based on the cross sectional data. However, due to time and financial constraints, the collection of longitudinal data which would have contributed more towards the understanding of choices and barriers was not possible.

The current study does not give an exhaustive picture of the variables involved in the choices and barriers. There may be other variables likely to contribute to the choices.

CONCLUSION

The research examines the life choices of employed women employees. Demographic data of the employees surveyed for this research gave interesting results on the lifestage choices, which could be largely made use of during recruitment. In summary, this study provides a comprehensive framework of the barriers and choices of women. This theoretical and empirical study of life choices of women are in conformity with some of the previous research works.

This study identifies four specific dimensions of choices. The influence of the selected barriers dimensions of choices and its impact is dealt in detail. The interrelationship among the choices and among the barriers along with its inferential output is brought out in this study.

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