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Overcoming the Widening Academic Research and Participation Gap: Indian Working Women's Barriers in Undertaking Up- Skilling

By Reenu Mohan¹, C. Nagadeepa² and Aasha Sujit

Abstract

The idea that women can be a powerful economic force needs to be universally accepted. Educated women have a better command over their lives and possess the capability to manage any situation. They get social recognition, which empowers them to achieve better social status and autonomy. Women face many impediments, and these hinder them from attaining higher work status. The observations till date show the numerous barriers women face in personal life, in academia, in the workplace, and in society.

The present study explores the personal, societal, and workplace challenges faced by working women in upgrading themselves through higher education. When women decide to take up higher education, they have to compromise some of their responsibilities, which lead to conflicts within the family. This current paper explores the success rate of working women in higher education despite the hurdles faced by them. Based on the objective, appropriate research methodology is adopted, and statistical tools are considered with graphical presentations.

Keywords: Women Academics, Up-skilling through Education, Workplace barriers, Structural equation modeling

Introduction

Women are a potent economic force who can bring growth to the family, workplace, and society. There is a well-known saying that educating a woman is equal to educating the whole family. Progress and prosperity without the education of women will merely remain a dream and so the importance of women's education should be recognized.

Educated women have better command of their lives and are capable of handling any situation. When compared to uneducated women, educated women have more power and control over the resources in the family. Education gives them social recognition and enables them to have better insight and awareness to perceive any situation better. As a result, educated women become empowered and are benefitted with good status and independence.

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Even though working women understand the need for education and careers and have taken great efforts to be in the workforce, their roles as mothers and wives impede them from taking significant steps towards success in their profession. Traditionally, married women are supposed to tend children and look after household work instead of going out for higher studies. Throughout the world, working women experience this phenomenon at one time or the other and strive to make a space for themselves. In this regard, feminists argue that traditional gender roles create many obstacles for working women both at home and in the workplace. Although women have climbed up the professional ladder and moved forward, social stigmas about them are still prevalent.

Gender bias and discrimination are still prevalent in different areas, and women are under-represented in advanced education and universities around the globe. Working women also find it difficult to get financial support to pursue their education. Regions and countries may differ, but the barriers for women's representation in advanced education are surprisingly similar among many regions.

Several women overcome these hurdles and continue to strike a balance between their career, family and higher education while some women surrender to the pressure and compromise their situation.

Up-skilling of Education

Up-skilling comprises technical skills, leadership quality, zeal, and aptitude. It is a course undertaken to achieve new skills and knowledge to improve career prospects. It may be a technical skill or a soft skill. As technology gains importance, only the employees who are equipped with an array of the most necessary skills, both hard skills and soft skills, will be able to navigate the organization's success in the right direction. An employee possessing an extensive repository of expertise will be considered a valuable asset by the employer. Up-skilling and learning offer higher bargaining power to grow and diversify the skills at an enhanced rate.

Select Literature

The root of work-life equilibrium issues in the organizational context is the outcome of women's employment and the expectations and assumptions about men's and women's roles and their relationship (Ramu 1987; as in Raisinghani and Goswami, 2014). Women have had to struggle a great deal in order to establish their individuality in this competitive world, both in society as well as in professional life. Conditions have improved substantially with the enhancement in educational and training institutions (Santhana Lakshmi and Gopinath, 2013).

As a consequence of household chores, female employees having young children experience conflicts and personal health issues such as fatigue and absenteeism. Moreover, they demonstrate inefficiency and have difficulties taking on new responsibilities at work (Choudhary and Shrivastava, 2005).

Several subtle and covert barriers for women's advancement still exist in the society, even though many formal and structural impediments have disappeared. If we look at public sector employment, women have reported less favorably on matters such as communication, cooperation, and recognition of their employment accomplishments (Bryson *et al.*, 2014).

Usha and Sharma (2001) indicate that educated women have more extensive control over their lives and more power over resources within the family than uneducated women. They get

social recognition, as well as an awareness of what is undesirable and unfavorable. An educated woman can comprehend what is within her reach and what she is better able to focus on to improving her prospects.

Poulose and Sudarshan (2014) discuss the factors affecting work-life balance that can be categorized. These include societal, organizational, and individual factors. The individual factors include emotional intelligence, personality, and well-being. Organizational factors involve work arrangements, work-life balance practices and policies, colleague support, job stress, organization support, support from their superiors at work, and role conflicts. Societal factors include spousal support, family support, childcare arrangements, and social support, personal and family issues. Other factors include parental status, gender, marital status, age, and experience. In other words, there exist many unseen barriers that hinder women from advancing beyond certain level in their careers and workplaces. The prominent factors contributing to this invisible barrier are mainly the biased treatment given to women in comparison to men.

Objectives of the study

The paper's objectives are to scrutinize:

- The barriers for married working women to achieve up-skilling in education or upgrading their educational qualifications to achieve career growth.
- Examine when and why married women withdraw themselves from higher education studies.
- Examine the factors which influence the up-skilling of education among married working women.

Research Methodology

This study aims to find the barriers that prevent working women from up-skilling in their education and observes the reasons for their dropping out. Primary data was secured using questionnaires collected from various women working in various fields in Bangalore. A total of 200 samples were collected for the research. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part collected demographic data including age, occupation, and family information such as number of family members, children, and control of their income. The second component of the questionnaire involved questions about the barriers to the up-skilling of education for married women. In this research, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure each variable, ranging from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5. Questionnaires are distributed to 294 respondents. A total of 200 full questionnaires were considered for the research and rest were not considered due to incomplete responses. The collected data were coded and entered into the AMOS tool for analysis and interpretation. Based on the objectives, this paper identified the significant factors or barriers for women to up-skilling their education. The barriers are of three types:

Internal Factors: Family and Personal Barriers

Household responsibility: Working women perform two full-time jobs, in order to compete with men who have only one full-time job. Women's decisions advance their higher education would result in compromising anyone of their responsibilities.

There is no freedom to make decisions: It is obligatory on the part of women to obtain the acquiescence of their male "guardian" for enrolling in any course or taking a job. Women are required to be socially submissive to the men of their family.

Attitude of relatives: The family members who surround the husband and wife interfere and give their opinions and decisions regarding the career aspects of women in the family.

Time management issues: The household chores and responsibilities await women when they return home. But in the case of academics, they have to prepare for their classes next day, and have many other non-academic assignments. Hence, it is difficult to manage time properly.

Responsibility towards family members: It is assumed by all that women should give due consideration to their husbands and children after work. When women have other work responsibilities, it results in ego clashes and break-ups in marriages. Beyond this there is little time left for social interactions and functions.

Financial issues: Unequal pay makes it harder for women to make financial decisions at home. They are dependent on family members to support them monetarily. Moreover, they find it difficult to search for sponsorships for higher education.

Knowledge and skills: Often, women lack the technical skills essential for higher educational purposes, and their knowledge level is far behind that of men as they do not accept willingly the opportunities of knowledge up-gradation.

Self-motivation: Many invisible barriers affect the mental state of women; as a result they succumb to pressure or compromise with their situation. They are afraid of taking on higher education, because women are often not confident that they would be able to manage their dual responsibilities and please everyone at home at the same time.

External: Societal Barriers

Social attitudes: Women academics enjoy constant respect from society, as the teaching profession is considered the most suitable for women. The attitude of society is that this profession enables women to achieve a better work-life balance compared to corporate jobs.

Social concepts: Indian society instills the notion that women are vulnerable. Instead of focusing on equality with men, it tries to protect women from them. Though husbands enjoy the earnings of their wives their egos do not permit them to accept her as equal.

Social beliefs: Women from lower economic strata are obligated to work to meet financial obligations. When the economic condition of the family improves, women are confined to domestic duties.

Social behaviors: Women are not supposed to rise and define the social rules. They are socialized throughout their lives to be submissive, and if they dare to go against the social rules, they have to confront practices such as gender apartheid, acid burnings, and honor killings.

External Barriers in the Workplace

Lack of Management Support: Women are offered very few high visibility, mission-critical roles, and international experiences, which are essential to obtain the premier levels of leadership. Even with adequate education, women across the world still lack equal access to opportunities. Women looking for their fundamental rights pose a direct challenge to the existing power structures.

Non-availability of resources: In several instances, the resources required for higher education within the workplace are inadequate for women employees. There is a gap between the requirements and efforts to provide those resources in the workplace.

Work-life balance: Usually women find it difficult to divide their personal life and work life. Since there is lack of participation from men in sharing the household chores and childcare, women have to struggle to meet the demands of productive labor as well as domestic labor. As a result of overexertion, women's physical and mental health are affected.

Harassment: Dress code rules for women employees in certain corporations impose restrictions. Problems such as sexual advances and harassment affect their relationships with colleagues and gradually their drive to work decreases. Most women fall into the vicious cycle of men who lure them on the pretext of love and harass them because they believe that working women are vulnerable.

Based on the objectives, the following **conceptual framework is offered:**

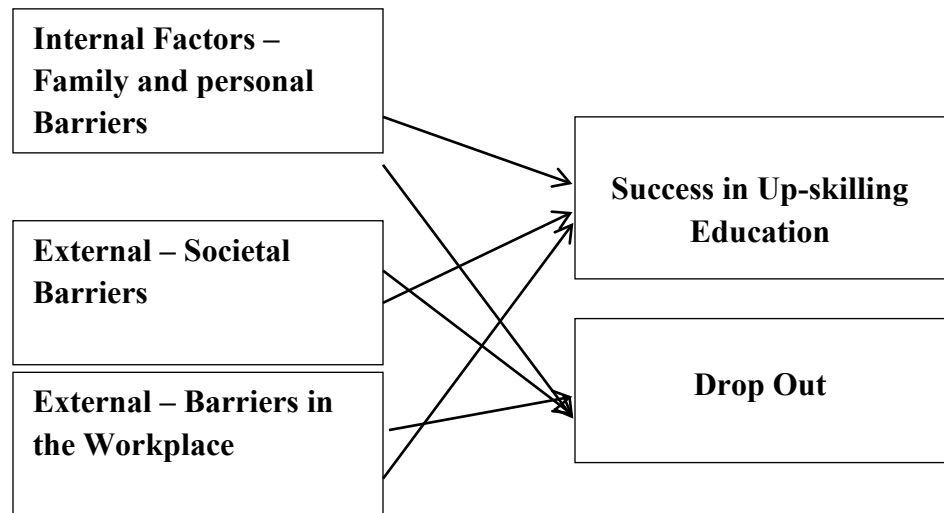


Fig 1: Conceptual Model - Working women's barriers to undertaking Up-skilling Education

Hypothesis

H1: Family and personal barriers impact the working married women’s success in the up-skilling of education.

H2: Societal barriers have an impact on working women's success in the up-skilling of education.

H3: The barriers in the workplace have an impact on working women's success in up-skilling education.

Data Analysis

The respondents’ demographic profiles were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The following points have been analyzed based on their responses.

The age group of 200 respondents: 37% of them are below 30 years old, 48% of the respondents are between 31 years to 0 years old, and the rest of them are above 40 years.

Marital status: 34% of the women respondents are unmarried, and the rest are married.

Occupation: 28.5% of women respondents are working in the Information Technology field, 18.5% of the women respondents are working in various positions in the medical care field, and 42.2% are lecturers, professors and teachers, and are generally academicians. The rest of them work in various positions in various other fields.

The response for the number of members in their families: 45.5% of them have less than five members in their family, 25.5% have six as family members, and the rest have more than six members in their family.

Sixty-five percent of married women have at least one or two children, and 20% of them have more than two children.

Among the women respondents, 25% of them are dependent on their family members even though they are working. Women give their salaries to their male guardians (husband or parents), as others control their income, and they need to obtain approval from them to spend the money.

To prove the hypothesis, we used SEM, and the following Table 1 demonstrates how the model fits the analysis.

Table 1. Model Fit Indication of Goodness of Fit

Fit Statistics	Recommended	Obtained	Explanation
Chi-square (χ^2)	-	112.005	Good
Df	-	71.2	Good
χ^2 significance	$p \leq 0.05$	0.002	Good
χ^2/df	<5	1.449	Good
GFI	>0.90	0.877	Moderate
AGFI	>0.90	0.817	Moderate
NFI	>0.90	0.910	Good
CFI	>0.90	0.958	Good
RMSEA	<0.08	0.074	Good

Using AMOS software, the objectives are analyzed using SEM for the present study. The model shows various barriers (dependent variable). The above Table 1 shows the test results. The model is approved and considered fit, as all the five indices GFI, AGFI, NFI, and CFI are above the typically required points, as mentioned in the fit model table. The following table shows the various regressions weight of the dependent and independent variables.

Table 2: Estimates of Dependent and Independent Variables

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Internal Factors – Family and personal Barriers (H1)	Success in Up-skilling Education	.688	.115	3.616	0.003
External – Societal Barriers (H2)	Success in Up-skilling Education	.305	.131	3.874	0.001
External – Barriers in the Workplace (H3)	Success in Up-skilling Education	.487	.090	2.185	0.037*

This research discovered the impact of external and internal barriers of working women's success in up-skilling in education. All three variables have had an impact on the completion of

their education, as the P-value is less 0.05. The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 3.616 and 3.874 in absolute value is less than 0.01 (p-value), and 2.185 (p-value) in absolute value is less than .005. The critical ratio index is the guide for removing the existing paths.

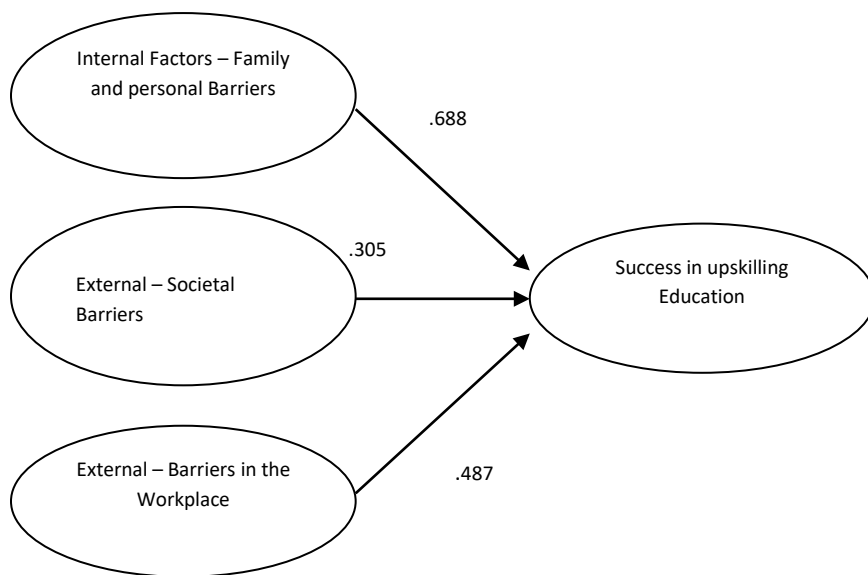


Fig 2: Path Analysis

Internal Factors: Family and Personal Barriers

Within all three barriers, working women struggle and have more problems within their families as the test showed the highest estimate of 0.688. Most of the working women face problems in balancing their household responsibilities, work-life ratio, and education. They have time management issues. However, very few women in the urban areas were found to suffer from barriers to their freedom and bad attitudes of their relatives as compared to rural working women. It was found in the survey that working women in urban areas do not have many financial issues as they have more financial freedom compared to their rural counterparts. Only 25% of them have dropped out of their courses because of these factors. Most of them are succeeding in their careers due to their increased educational levels.

External/Societal Barriers

Social barriers also do not impact much on the success of their education as the estimated value 0.305 showed the least value among all other variables. Because of this external barrier, only 2% of them dropped their up-skilling in education.

External Barriers in the Workplace

The second factor that affects working women’s success in their up-skilling of education is workplace barriers, as the estimated beta value is 0.487. Non-availability of needed resources (library resources, permission to take up higher studies, books and journal in their library, incentives on up skilling) and work-life balance are the common barriers faced by working

women in their working plans. Due to these factors, 30% of them have dropped out after joining the courses. Notwithstanding, 25% of them took a leave or resigned from their work to complete their up-skilling course. This shows their positive attitudes towards the completion of their course, in spite of the barriers.

Conclusion

In the contemporary workplace, upgrading ourselves with knowledge and skills is mandatory to continue and achieve career growth. This paper considered the obstacles working women face in completing or achieving their up-skilling of education. Upgrading skills and education in the current scenario is required for career growth. The study found that most of the women struggle between their three spheres of life: family, work-life, and education. Even though family members do help, women still face many problems to complete their courses. Travel between home and the workplace with traffic make them very tired, and they also have to carry out their family responsibilities on return. Working women have to manage their time among their work, family, and education as it is a critical milestone to achieve in their careers. To reduce the drop-out rate, employers should offer reduced work requirements for those who engaged in up-skilling of their education.

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