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Diverging Women on the Mommy Track to the Career Track

By Sunaina Arora¹ and Dr. Neeraj Kumari²

Abstract

The review paper discusses the Mommy Track phenomenon and interventions required to bring women back on the career track. It collates the literature to understand the Mommy Track phenomenon from organisations and economic perspectives. The Mommy Track is a path which is taken by high performing women to take a career break in order to rear children. The idea is to switch back to career tracks when childcare duties require less time. Gender parity initiatives have tried to bridge male and female labour gaps to bring back women to career tracks. Changes in government interventions, organisation policies, and individual attitudes will create an equitable future for all. Policy makers should keep an eye on protecting the issues of the Mommy Track with laws to help women come back to career tracks, with a focus on parental leave, family friendly policies, hour work policies, and regulated childcare.

Keywords: Career Break, Mommy Track, Career Track, Gender Equality

Introduction

Women often postpone childbirth in order to move faster in their careers. But motherhood calls for efforts and duties towards the upbringing of a nurtured child. As childcare mostly falls to women, often they either shift to part time jobs or take time off their careers to fulfill their motherly duties. Working mothers sometimes see a dip in performance due to additional burdens at home. In order to balance both work and family, they might try to take a wage cut. Women try to resume their halted careers after their children start going to childcare centers or school. Gender equality is a well-known topic, yet society, individuals, governments, and other organisations have been slow to take concrete steps towards achieving gender equality. We need to take actions to remove barriers and the Mommy Track so that women are able to have the choice to continue in their careers after childbirth. Policy makers should make a point to roll out changes to increase gender parity.

Some women opt in for the Mommy track whereas some of them are pushed out of careers towards this phenomenon. When childcare duties take up a significant amount of the time, women will often opt in for freelance or part time work, which can cause a detrimental wage gap. As part-time work pays much less than full time work, the family wages decrease and create an income void. In our view, the career ladder is an inappropriate phrase as work is often non-linear for working mothers. Even though women delay motherhood, fertility age would make an impact for women to take a break or sideline their careers now or later, creating a non-linear career graph.

Hiring Bias and prejudice is prevalent when decisions to hire a workforce are taking place. Highly qualified non mothers or highly qualified men are often chosen over highly qualified mothers. The Mommy Track phenomenon is a stereotype instilled in the social brain of employers

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which hinders the hiring of mothers for specific roles, as employers might think that they might not be able to do justice to that role. The Mommy Track is a phrase used to describe women who lack a tunnel-vision commitment to their jobs and who leave their careers to have children (Byrne, 1990).

To bring women back to the career track, organization level interventions and government led interventions in policies are required. Family roles of women and men should be balanced in order to achieve balance between the work roles of men and women. Organisation level interventions such as, building gender inclusive workplaces, family friendly employee policies, employer sponsored childcare, and flexible work schedules would help more women to transit from the Mommy Track to Career Track. Government policy makers should focus on gender inclusive, nondiscriminatory policies for the female workforce, and childcare costs should be distributed amongst the community. Tax burdens should be proportionally marginalized for families that have women taking care of childcare duties. Small measures like these will help to create an equitable future for everyone and increase gender parity scores.

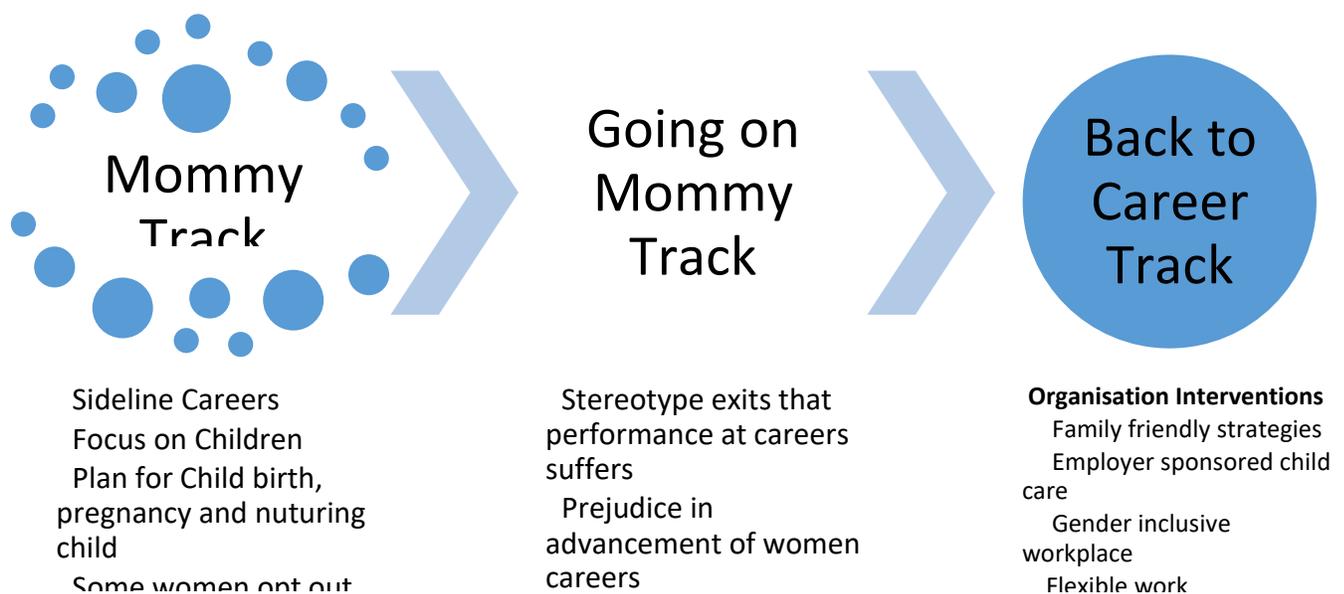


Figure 1: Diverging the Mommy Track to the Career Track
Source: Author Construct

Defining Mommy Track

Mothers often end up on the Mommy Track, a slower and less steep professional path that puts them behind non-mothers on career graphs and reduces their chances of being promoted to a managerial position in the workplace (Lucifora, Meurs and Villar, 2021). Women often miss out on prospects for promotion after they have children (Kingson, 1988). Women sometimes delay childbirth in the initial years in which they are setting up their careers to overcome the hurdles associated with career growth after added responsibilities of motherhood (Landau, 2016). When two working professionals marry, the decision of having a child will focus on reduction in family earnings. Mothers are often expected to take up childcare duties and either be out of the workforce for a few years or get a part time job which has an impact on family earnings (Sidle, 2011). The idea is that women take a break to fulfill motherhood duties and switch back to their careers when their children are in childcare centers or school. Organisations should sideline their high performing and highly qualified women to have flexible time to bear children and raise them by creating a slower career track for them, so that fewer women opt for the Mommy Track (Fairbank, 2007).

Going on the Mommy Track

After the birth of the first child, mothers often think that they would be able to take up work responsibilities as they were able to before having children. So there is often a decline in workforce involvement of women after the birth of the first child (Kuziemko, Pan, Shen & Washington, 2018). Women quit the workplace for child-raising in highly skilled occupations around the world. Recent statistics indicate that more and more highly qualified women give up their full-time work lives to raise children. Around the same time, women with high skills have fewer children than their peers with poor skills. Highly skilled women fear that having children will bring down their productivity. Taxation discriminates against working mothers and accelerates their exit from jobs (Kornberg, 2008). Not only women, but families and culture are affected by women's career discrimination. Workplace programs also focus on shifting women's mindsets rather than changing contexts that disadvantage women. Integration of stereotypes and job and family narratives of women's lateness in the growth of women bridges the views of "opting-out" and "push out"; some women opt out from the workforce fearing that their productivity would decrease and they might be looked down upon, while some women are pushed out of their careers because organizations prefer to fill their jobs with high performing men or non-mothers (Kossek, Su and Wu, 2017). The career growth of women is constrained by motherhood. While the effect of motherhood, work hours, work breaks, and school-aged children on career growth has been extensively studied, its actual scale and significance has gained less research focus. The results show that motherhood has a regressively detrimental impact on the progression of professions for women. However, this is a simplistic notion that involves a more intricate process related to the age, working hours, and work breaks of dependent children. The degree of women's limited occupational development is strongly associated with the dependent child's school age (McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro and Dabir Alai, 2012).

The timing of fertility influences average female job earnings, hours worked, and salary, as well as wage rates after motherhood. The delay in fertility can reduce the "family gap" in pay. The direct panel proof indicates a possible channel for the effect: a "Mommy Track." Women report decreased wages around the time of their first child and a flattening of the age-wage profile after motherhood. From the current data, it cannot be empirically determined if this is caused by mothers preferring to minimise their labour supply and human capital expenditure, or by

employers providing preferential care with reduced training and development opportunities for mothers. For women with higher earnings, the career advantages of delay are greater, although the expense of delay—medical, emotional, and other—does not seem to increase with earnings sufficient to completely compensate for the advantages. Taken together, the findings indicate that the timing of motherhood is important. For many women, work-family conflict, and on the fertility planning horizon, long-term career variables may matter (Miller, 2011). The main point is that gender stereotypes give rise to prejudiced decisions and choices that obstruct women's development. The paper examines how descriptive gender expectations perpetuate gender discrimination because of derogatory views of success resulting from the belief that there is a bad fit between what women are like and the features considered suitable for successful performance in male positions and roles of the gender type. Organisations have a mindset that women belong to their homes or family roles rather than office roles (Heilman, 2012).

Non-Linear Career Paths

Traditionally, career stories are indicative of personal needs and societal system values. In order to make progressive organisations in the future, people must see the falsity of the career ladder concept for women as the Mommy Track and work family balance creates a non-linear career path where women must step out or engage in less productive roles in order to give priority to their families. Career stories of high performing women are halted when motherhood happens and then the linear trajectory career path is broken and women might shift to corporate careers only after their children are school aged (Shapiro, Ingols and Blake-Beard, 2008).

Motherhood timing does influence the career path of a woman, but delaying motherhood would involve fertility issues. The break in the career paths cause wages to dwindle and family earnings to reduce considerably. That is why many women choose to delay motherhood while they are high performers in their careers as the result would be a broken career path (Miller, 2011).

The findings indicate that at some stage in their careers 47% of the women surveyed stopped working. Many reasons for leaving have been cited. Just 35% of the women who stopped working listed having children as their only reason. Sixty-two percent of women have indicated that their outlook on their career has shifted. Seventy percent rejected the idea that women leave because they do not believe mothers should work outside the home, confirming this view as a myth. However, our findings show barriers exist, particularly if time is taken off between jobs, as a non-linear career path makes it difficult to transition through organisations (Cabrera, 2007).

Part Time Work and the Detrimental Wage Gap

Part time work reduces the burden placed on mothers and family stress. It gives a mother the option to work and get paid when on break. But it is a tradeoff for women who are earning a high salary in a company as it reduces their earnings. But women can overcome the Mommy Track by opting in for part time work and balance the work at home and at the office. The part-time group recorded 47% fewer hours of work and 41% lower earnings than the full-time group. These data support the idea that a new model of part-time employment is a viable choice for women in professional professions to effectively incorporate their extra family work. The prospect of a new definition of part-time employment affects the ability of pre-school mothers working in skilled professions to effectively balance work and family commitments while retaining career opportunities (Hill, Martinson, Ferris and Baker, 2004).

First of all, immediate pay and long-term wage growth will diminish when new moms transition to part-time jobs. Second, for several years or longer, new mothers may disappear from

the workforce and this withdrawal may lead to a slower career direction. We might think that withdrawal tendencies or shifts to part-time status are more widespread in low-skilled women than high-skilled women, and low-skilled mothers are more likely than higher-skilled mothers to be out-of-work. However, in particular, for high-skilled women, improvements in working behaviour after childbirth are actually much greater, particularly with regard to part-time employment (Wilde, Batchelder and Ellwood, 2010). Unemployment rates and family job breaks are penalised by reduced resulting incomes, whereas the wage impact of self-employment and educational leave is marginal. It was found that family career breaks and spells of unemployment were more detrimental for males than for females (Theunissen, Verbruggen, Forrier and Sels, 2011).

The pay penalty occurs because highly qualified women are already earning well in high-income jobs and these sharp employment paths allow them to miss significant quantities of wage growth over the usually short period of time they spend. The highest overall maternal penalties refer to high expertise and high salaries; they are usually very rich even though mothers endure the heaviest penalties because their own income stays high in comparison with that of other women (England, Bearak, Budig and Hodges, 2016).

Hiring Bias and Prejudice

Defining hiring bias is difficult, but simplified, it is a view or group that is unequal or partial to a view or group. With respect to race, partiality can be focused on prejudice that is to be deemed morally superior to others by persons or classes. The explanation for this partiality can nevertheless be unconscious and accidental. Bias may be rooted in culture or discrimination, which encourages group members against members of other communities through the socialisation of children and younger members. Unconscious bias can also occur. Prejudice is when a person retains or demonstrates an unfavourable, preconceived judgement or belief about someone else. The sense of the term underlines the lack of facts and the lack of confidence in discovering evidence to justify this mentality. Neuroscientists have recently shown that biases in thinking are built into the very way the brain processes information (Sevo and Chubin, 2010).

The use of sex as a signal of loyalty results in hiring a lower number of women in the labour force. Owing to the time spent in childcare, young women are categorised into slow-motion careers, and young men are classified into quick-building careers. Once parenting happens, employers observe the parent's care time and classify workers who are not taking time out for childcare to higher performing positions. Likewise, childless women can be sorted into fast-track occupations after a few years of childlessness (Preston, 1997). The hiring managers with more pessimistic attitudes towards women had a higher orientation towards social dominance, while those with more optimistic attitudes towards women had a lower orientation towards social dominance (Jones, 2010). The disparities in favour of men are an indication of gender disparity in recruiting workforce. When women have higher education, this bias is diminished, and the bias grows even more when they have children. Gender bias in recruiting is primarily based on the stereotypes of employers rather than biases (González, Cortina and Rodríguez, 2019).

Biological, Social, and Family Work of Women

Men and women's responsibilities tend to differ when it comes to family dynamics and roles. The roles of men at work and women at work must be compared to know more about the work family concept. Paid work means that from finishing education to retirement men and women participate in work full time in order to contribute to the economy. For both partners to work it becomes difficult to manage the family roles effectively. In order to bring a balance of work and

family roles, equal sharing of family roles is required and a new model for work needs to be developed in order to balance women's family workload which gives importance to family needs of a woman (Pleck, 1977).

Biological fertility has a negative effect on postponing maternity. It's shocking to see the increasing incidence of abortion and stillbirths due to postponement of motherhood. Focusing on the actions of mothers during first birth, the research isolates the impact of postponing motherhood from that of overall fertility. The calculations indicate that delaying the first birth by one year increases the probability of inclusion in the labour force by 1.2 percentage points and weekly working time by about half an hour. But there is little evidence that late motherhood would reduce the deterioration of the working conditions of new mothers. This means that even if women delay their motherhood, they would still experience the effects of the Mommy Track, just later in their careers (Bratti and Cavalli, 2014).

Men and women disagree about the gendered division of labor in the home. How do idealised motherhood fictions inform the subjectivities of working mothers? What are the strategies used by women to resist cultural expectations entitling husbands to emotional jobs for women? How much does it cost? Finally, what about expert debate practices who counsel women on work and love? When conception, childbirth, and breastfeeding are referred to as a single kit, they are all viewed as biologically defined and even unalterably attributed to women. The linguistic patterns reaffirm the idea that family work rightly belongs on women's shoulders as we refer to men as 'babysitting' their own children, as 'helping out' around the home, or as 'supporting spouses'? Does this support an economy that is tipped in the interest of men? Investigations such as these would create rich accounts layered with inconsistencies such as life itself (Marecek, 2003).

Back to the Career Track

Organisational Level Interventions

Organisations would benefit from a happier and efficient workforce if they developed family-friendly strategies to help workers balance the demands of job and family life. Taking time off from work to meet family needs was seen as unprofessional, detrimental to the culture of work, and on the "Mommy Track" gave women a one-way ticket. Organisations have realized that if their workforce is happy to come to work the efficiency or productivity of their staff will exponentially increase. Therefore, the importance of family friendly policies is highlighted (McKenney, 2007).

The case study talks about how productivity of organisations will be managed if all women started taking special requests of taking time off or requesting four days a week to spend more time with their children. Managers will have a tough task to allocate key customers to such staff who want to work for a limited time. Thus, they would avoid developing a time off policy which is partial towards women. Also, men and women colleagues who share the workload of women who take time off to take care of kids feel awkward if time off requests happen regularly (Hayashi, 2001). Employer supported childcare can be in terms of providing an actual space where children can be taken care of near or within the office premises. Secondly, it can be in the form of providing parental education or re-skilling. Thirdly, it can be providing financial aid to support childcare through vendors or babysitters. Fourthly, it can be a way to schedule the job of the new parents by giving options of flexi time, job sharing, or part time arrangements (Auerbach, 1990). In spite of gender equality practices, gender inequality still persists in different levels of all organisations. The gender gap in leadership can only be overcome by building an inclusive workplace and ensuring equal representation of males and females at the workplace. It can happen only when we

bring equality at all levels of an organisation (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). Several organisations have started to focus on raising and managing gender equity, with a focus on promoting programmes for working mothers, such as the introduction of flexible work-hour rules and childcare and mentoring/internal projects directed specifically at mothers interested in returning to work. Women supportive policies in organisations will make reentry for women easier (Kaushiva and Joshi, 2020). Lifetime work for women has been thought to be in contrast with their reproductive responsibilities, with detrimental effects for either economic productivity or reproduction. Jobs and childbearing are progressively being mixed. Labor market frameworks, national policy, employer guidelines, and procedures and cultural values combined create complex ecosystems in which work and parenthood can be supported. Parents' job options will be expanded over time and through the payment of maternity and parental leave.

These interventions tend to make a difference. Parental leave expenses are part of the collective burden of rearing children, and not all of them can be paid by employees or employers. The costs of any pension deficits suffered by individual parents should therefore be borne by the government. Re-skilling is required for mothers who plan to return to the labour market. The unsatisfactory essence of part-time employment that has arisen indicates that part-time work ought to provide at least pro rata, non-wage incentives added to its working arrangements in order to improve parents' momentum. Some allowance to cover for the detrimental pension effects of part-time employment while care will be justified in consideration of the social gains of rearing children. A regulation on family-hours will therefore encourage the state to signal that it supports childcare and the participation of both parents in this undertaking. Families may continue to use retail childcare and a regulatory position should be taken by the State to ensure the availability of the best quality expectations. Parents and decision makers need more knowledge about the results of various forms of childcare. The needs of childcare staff for preparation should be met, and so there is the matter of who pays for the provision. After-school and holiday care plans should not be ignored (Dex and Joshi, 1999). There is a positive correlation between mother's access to childcare facilities and employment. So, if employers provide mothers access to childcare facilities more women on the Mommy Track can be brought to the career track (Cebrián, Davia, Legazpe & Moreno, 2019).

Government Level Interventions

Affirmative action and family policies will allow more effort to build a fair market for women in the workforce, and can lead the economy to gender balance. However, we find that a temporary strategy is unlikely to drive the economy with non-discriminatory policies. Both male and females should be treated equally and provided equal opportunities for pay and work (Lommerud, Straume and Vagstad, 2013).

Child-care programs are efficient in improving quality and reducing gender inequality. Cost of childcare should be a societal cost. High performing mothers have childcare as a regular expense but compare themselves to stay at home mothers and experience mothers' guilt phenomenon. There is also ample proof that high quality formal childcare offers a greater result for infants than casual care for less advantaged mothers who have opted out of their careers (Barigozzi, Cremer and Roeder, 2020). Temporal Flexibility is not a solution to bridging the gender gap; instead, childcare facilities for working parents will help to bridge the gender gap. So, governments should focus on providing better childcare facilities (Bear, 2021).

Women may never achieve their best definition of motherhood as the challenges are ongoing. Women have been challenged by careers and motherhood for a long time.

Responsibilities of children should be borne by the community so that women are able to work for the economy. Unpaid house jobs and day care must be taken care of if the economy wants their women to work productively (Douglas and Michaels, 2005).

The decreased rate of paid labour involvement of highly skilled mothers is the outcome of a mix of complicated social and economic influences that discourage highly skilled women from raising several children and from working. To the point that we overwhelmingly over-tax secondary earners, in particular working moms, by joint filing and non-taxation of imputed income, the tax system can and should be reformed to eliminate certain distortions. Moreover, the tax code should prioritise working mothers to reduce the distortions induced by other social movements that leave the brunt of unpaid household labour on their shoulders. By equalising the earned labour wages of mothers and husbands, this tax reform will equalize earnings of paid and unpaid jobs at home (Kornberg, 2008).

This proves that the gender parity index on health, schooling, unemployment, and political participation has a largely positive impact on Asia's long-term economic development. Gender representation is thus a primary determinant of economic growth in Asian countries and should therefore be taken into account when planning for women's empowerment (Mishra, Mishra and Sarangi, 2020).

Research Methodology

Research objectives

1. To describe the Mommy Track.
2. To identify reasons why women take the Mommy Track.
3. To find out how women on the Mommy Track can be brought back on the career track.

Research questions

1. What is the Mommy Track?
2. Why do women take the Mommy Track?
3. How can women who are on the Mommy Track be brought back on the career track?

The research study aims to describe the 'Mommy Track' phenomenon. It would find out the reasons why women take the Mommy Track and steps to be taken to bring women back on the career track. Literature available is associated with the study to answer the research questions.

Background of the Study

Gender inequalities in the workplace is a global concern. The majority of women do not return to the workforce after going on the Mommy Track. The aim is to reduce the economic strain by reducing the number of women going on the Mommy Track and encouraging more women to return to the career track.

How Does the Literature Review Answer the Research Questions?

Table 1. Answers to the Research Questions

Research Question?	Answers from Literature
What is the Mommy Track?	Mothers on a "Mommy Track," which is a slower and less steep professional path are placed behind non-mothers on the employment ladder which reduces their chances of being promoted to a managerial position in the workplace (Lucifora, Meurs and Villar, 2021). The Mommy Track is a phrase used to describe women who lack a tunnel-vision commitment to their jobs and leave their careers to have children (Byrne, 1990).
Why do women take the Mommy Track?	High-skilled women fear that having children will bring down productivity (Kornberg, 2008). Women are pushed out or they opt out of their careers because organisations prefer to fill their jobs with high performing men or non-mothers (Kossek, Su and Wu, 2017). Organisations often have a mindset that women belong to their homes or family roles rather than office roles (Heilman, 2012).
How can women who are on the Mommy Track be brought back on the career track?	Organisations should develop family-friendly strategies to help workers balance job and family life (McKenney, 2007). New parents should be given flexi time, job-sharing, part-time work (Auerbach, 1990), childcare and mentoring options (Kaushiva and Joshi, 2020). Reskilling is required for mothers who plan to return to the labour market (Dex and Joshi, 1999). Part-time employment enables pre-school mothers working in skilled professions to effectively balance work and family commitments while retaining career opportunities (Hill, Martinson, Ferris and Baker, 2004). Temporal Flexibility is not a solution to bridging the gender gap; instead childcare facilities for working parents will help to bridge the gender gap (Bear, 2021). Both male and females should be treated equally and provided equal opportunities for pay and work (Lommerud, Straume and Vagstad, 2013). Unpaid house jobs and day care must be taken

	care of if the economy wants their women to work productively (Douglas and Michaels, 2005).
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Source: Self-construct

Implications of the Research

For Organisations

- Reskill women who took the Mommy Track and bring them back to the career track
- Provide access to better childcare facilities to bring them back to the workforce
- Provide flexible work time, work from home, or part time opportunities to bring women on the Mommy Track back to the career track.
- Reduce hiring bias and prejudice for women who have taken the Mommy Track and accept more women who wish to come back to the career track.
- High performing women should have lesser duties when they wish to plan families.
- Introduce more family friendly policies focusing on women on the Mommy Track to bring them back on the career track.

For Governments

- Creating equal opportunities for pay and work.
- Tax reforms should take care of paid work at the office and unpaid work at home.
- Earnings of families with children where mothers are involved in household and caretaking duties should have a tax benefit where the families are not penalized for a single earning member whereas the tax is balanced for this segment.
- To improve gender parity index more women empowerment initiatives should be carried out by the government.

Conclusion

The path taken by women forcibly or willingly to sideline their careers and take on their motherly duties is termed as the 'Mommy Track'. More highly qualified women give up their full-time work lives for rearing or bringing up children. Sometimes they are pushed out by employers because of low performance due to their involvement in motherly duties. Since fertility is linked to the age of a woman, it clashes with the growth and career paths. It is obvious that women take a non-linear career path and halt in between to fulfill the responsibilities of bearing and taking care of children. The prejudice towards mothers not being able to perform productively as compared to non-mothers or men push them to opt out of their careers. In order to come back to their career path, women try to take up part-time work which widens the pay gap. Organisations should opt for family friendly policies and promote gender diversity across all roles. Organisations should give new parents flexible work time, access to childcare, and mentoring and job-sharing options. In order to bring more women back to the career track, the government should adjust the childcare cost. Government policies should create equal work and equal pay policies to bring back more women to the career track. Governments should encourage parental leave policies to bring down the stress levels of new parents. All the initiatives would help to curtail the Mommy Track phenomenon and encourage more women to be on the career track.

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