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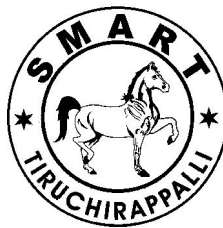
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**CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN  
SEEKING JOB AFTER A CAREER BREAK IN IT  
COMPANIES IN NORTH INDIA (DELHI/NCR)**

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***Abstract***

*Many studies have been attempted, to examine the extent of women's participation in Indian workforce and their growing contribution towards the country's economic progress. Their contribution, as proved in these studies, is substantial but also ridden with issues and one of them being career breaks due to personal commitments. This domain has attracted little attention by Indian corporate houses and even policy makers and friendly workplace/policies are yet to be initiated, for such women professionals. This study aims to review the current status of hiring women, after a career break, in Indian IT and IT enabled companies and focus on the reasons for them taking a break from career. A survey of fifty women employees, in Delhi-NCR, was carried out, which revealed that health issues, marriage, child care, elder care and spouse relocation were among the major causes of career break. Lowered/same scale of remuneration, health issues, and need for re-skilling were some of the issues, faced by women seeking employment, after a career break in this sector.*

**Keywords:** Career Break, Workforce, Re-Hiring

**JEL Code:** D23, L20, O15, J16, J24.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, majority of women are faced with the dual responsibility of working at an organization, to earn their daily bread and butter as well as at home. Women employees are trapped with priorities, towards family or marriage and hence regarded as less competent or bankable in the workplace as compared to men (Walker & Woehr, 2014). Also, women classified as 'wife' or 'mother' are often considered to be less dependable for critical work projects (Gokhru & Desai, 2016). The striking feature of this observation is their commonality, across different countries. As per a study, across twenty nine countries of Asia, MENA (Middle East & North Africa) and America, included in Global Research Council (GRC), all the countries, including India, have extended their policy towards women employment, with career breaks (Metcalf & Day, 2016). According to the British Council (2015), organizations, employing women with career breaks, need a different set of policies. For instance, fund disbursement to organize special training and workshops. Such initiatives help women upgrade their skills, to perform work, after a career break. India is no stranger to this phenomenon because many women face similar issues, in finding work after a career break (Nandy, et al., 2014). Women face indecisive career gaps, owing to personal responsibilities, demanded by their households (Malo & Muñoz-Bullón, 2004). Unlike other countries, India witnesses an additional constraint of perceived responsibilities of women at home, as a presumption necessary to carry forward traditional beliefs (Thakkar, 2014). Griffiths & Moore (2010) recorded an unprecedented number of women, disappearing from IT and IT enabled services sector, in order to change their profession or to remain unemployed due to family responsibilities. Also in the case of India,

despite the IT/ITeS sector, having a sizable number of women workers, turnover among them increases as the career graph climbs higher up the career ladder due to household responsibilities and patriarchal norms of society (Ranjana & Gunjan, 2016). India's IT/ITeS sector, in the face of such a situation, has come up with several initiatives, to provide women with career breaks, opportunities to re-establish their career. According to Rajesh (2013), companies like Tata Group, Accenture, IBM, and Microsoft, among others, have included special provisions for women returning to work after a break, such as concessions in work hours and easy transition from one shift timing to another, particularly for women with child care responsibilities. Increasing organizational support, in terms of flexible working arrangements, mentoring, skill building programs and day care centers, is being provided at IT sector organizations. The situation can be marked as a turning point towards increasing women's participation in the workforce, after career breaks. Against this perceived deficiency, the present study proposes to delve into the situation of re-hiring of women, within the IT/ITeS sector, after a career break in India.

## 2. Review of Literature

Re-hiring of women poses several questions, on their eligibility in corporate organizations. The eligibility criteria pertain to a number of factors such as maximum time women can give to the work, advanced skill set required for the job, and their inclination towards continuity in the profile. According to Herman (2011), the challenges, faced by women looking for job opportunities while returning to the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) industry, include need for skills updating, required set of recent experiences, age discrimination and also gender bias from recruitment agencies while re-hiring women. Following this, the notable

barriers experienced by the re-hired women, within the corporate organizations including ICT, were studied by **Ravindran & Baral (2014)**. According to the study, the diverse climate of organizations has been defined as the attitudes and behaviors of colleagues, seniors and subordinates towards women seeking work, after a career break. This affected women's perspective of the organization and discouraged them from working. The results of their study indicated that other organizational culture-related factors like organizational justice and supportive work policies, are the major areas of concern, for women seeking work after a career break. **Buddhapriya (2009)** has also postulated societal barriers, which involve two broad classifications - priority towards family responsibility and lack of gender-sensitive policies. In this regard, family responsibility is a comprehensive concept, that pertains to a woman's duties towards marriage, elder care, pregnancy and child care. Furthering this assertion, **Richa Saxena (2013)** also predicated continuous relocation of spouse, as a significant barrier, to women seeking work after a career break. The IT industry in India employs a large number of women professionals. However, the work place conditions and the management systems are designed for men like long working hours, high pressure to meet deadlines, frequent travel etc. It forces women to leave careers or change to low end jobs. Even if some firms provide women - friendly support systems like crèches, work from home etc, yet their household domestic roles may hamper their careers. According to a study, done in Australia, women often encounter salary issues when they return to work. The length of the career breaks explains why women are unable to get back to work (**Shobha, et al., 2004**). Thus, women's re-joining work, after a career break, is discouraged by both professional and personal barriers.

Barriers, faced by women after getting re-hired, are not without legitimate reasons, although they warrant further investigation. Women, returning to work post-break, are sometimes charged with negligence by employers. The most notable explanation of expressing unwillingness, to re-hire women, is the lack of satisfaction from their work (**Walker & Woehr, 2014**). The reason, quoted for this skepticism, has been widely discussed but confined to a single area, i.e. marriage. According to **Nadler & Kufahl (2014)**, marital status of women is a critical factor, for hiring women after a career break. According to Houston, women, returning to work after any kind of family engagements, are given a reduced job status, with the assumption of low performance, after such engagements. The arguments, generated by these scholars, belong to the current modernized society. Another misbelief about women returners, in all types of organizations, relates to the perceived poor health of women, joining after bearing children. Also in the case of marriage, the employer's belief of low participation and work interest of a newly-married woman, often reduces the chances of them being re-hired (**Younger et al., 2015**). Interestingly, **Latha & Sindhuja (2016)** challenge the skepticism asserted by various studies, on the part of the organizations and establish that there is need for continual efforts of policy development in business organizations, to secure women's rights on job and work status. The benefit of re-hiring women is that this talent is already trained and in most cases, the need for substantial training can be eliminated in case of experienced women workers. Also, it offers a cost benefit to the organizations, in terms of flexible working hours for women employees, as the organization will have less remuneration liabilities (**Rajesh & Umasanker, 2016**). Thus, referring to these

advantages of employing women with career breaks, the organizations have little to lose by providing employment to women returners. Upon establishing the theoretical overview of the barriers, faced by women returners as well as the advantages organizations can enjoy upon re-hiring them, this study attempts to dwell on the problems faced by women seeking employment, after a career break and subject this issue to further empirical research. The methodology, followed by this study, is described below.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

The issue of finding employment, after career break, faced by women, remains grave in most sectors. The information technology sector, which is heavily dependent on talent and skills of employees, is no different, as it is one of the worst in this aspect. This situation warrants a study on the reasons for women taking a career break and the problems, faced by them, in finding employment post career breaks.

### **4. Need of the Study**

Despite the rapid advancement made in the workforce, across the country, such as increase in liberty given to employees, diversity at the workplace and attractive career opportunities, the issue of finding employment, after career break, faced by women, remains grave in many sectors. This study would enable companies to anticipate better, which employees are likely to go on a break and how to avoid discrimination, during their hiring process of such women.

### **5. Objective of the Study**

The present study aims to review the problems, faced by women, seeking work after a career break, in the IT Sector of India. The study also aims to find out the common reasons, for women taking a break, from their careers.

The objectives of this study are to understand how career breaks affect women employees, in terms of their career progression and skills development and to understand the advantages to companies, in hiring women professionals, after career breaks.

### **6. Hypotheses of the Study**

**NH-1:** Women's preference, for offered job profile, remains unchanged after career break

**NH-2:** Women face no particular health issues, after re-joining, from career break.

**NH-3:** Women experience no behavioural changes, among co-workers, after re-joining from career break

**NH-4:** Women face no salary issues, after re-joining, from career break

**NH-5:** Women experience the need for re-skilling, after re-joining, from career break

### **7. Research Methodology**

The methodology, adopted in this study, was descriptive in nature since the objective was to understand the barriers faced by women, in IT/ITeS sector, while deciding to join after a career break.

#### **7.1 Sample Selection**

The study followed a quantitative approach, consisting of a survey of 50 employees, each from an IT organization, based in Gurgaon and Noida region, through a telephone call to the companies' HR departments, followed by a formal email, explaining the intent of the study. Women, who started working after a career break, were sought from the firms, for participation in the survey. The number of women, participating from each firm, was uneven (firm A=6, firm B=8, firm C=13, firm D=17, and firm E=6). Therefore, the sampling plan followed was stratified random approach,

where stratification was made, on the basis of time period and reason behind career break.

## 7.2 Sources of Data

Secondary sources of information such as books, published research papers, company reports and news articles, were used. For the purpose of empirical study, primary source of information, through the survey method, was also used. A close-ended and structured questionnaire was administered primarily through electronic mail and also through physical administration.

## 7.3 Period of the Study

The time period of the study was October 2016 to January 2017.

## 7.4 Tools Used

Analysis of the data collected was performed by using Frequency and Cross-tabulation tool, through SPSS software.

## 8. Analysis of Data

The demographic profile of respondents, reflected a middle-aged group, dominating the selected population, within the sample organizations. Duration of the break was a minimum eight years to more than 13 years, among the surveyed population, with 0-7 years having subordinate presence (**Table-1**). Establishing the prominent presence of women, taking a career break of more than five years, the study also highlighted the reason behind such a long gap and whether there was the need for re-skilling and up-skilling, as a result. Reasons for taking a break were divided into two categories– one below six percent and the other ranging between 14 percent and 20 percent. While the former comprised of reasons like higher studies, lack of professional growth, pressure from family, elder care, relocation and such others, the latter was related to pregnancy and childcare, marriage and lack of flexible working options, which was also related to child

care and familial responsibilities (**Table-2**). Requirement of de-skilling and up-skilling, after rejoining work after a career break, was also studied, among the sampled respondents. It was found that maximum requirement, for skill development, was needed among those taking a break of 13 years or more while those taking a break of a year or less, required negligible period for skill development (**Table-3**). Obstacles, faced during job search upon returning from career break, included issues such as confidence, age discrimination, and gender bias, specifically among respondents taking a break of longer periods, i.e. more than two years and there was not much of an obstacle for respondents, taking a break for a year or less or for educational purposes (**Table-4**). Barriers, faced during the period of rejoining, included lack of crèche facilities/childcare responsibilities, employers' perception of skill deterioration (justifying the need for re-skilling), and offer of lower level jobs from the previous one held and underemployment, leading to minimal utilization of the respondents' skills (**Table-5**).

The study recognized various challenges like lower responsibilities, lower salary or lower job status, that women had to face after re-joining workforce, from a career break. However, the same was put forth by an intuitive idea following the responses received from the survey. The present section intends to test these hypotheses, based on these ideas, using inferential techniques like Cross Tabulation (**Table-6**). The results of cross tabulation were analyzed by using the Chi square test, to estimate the significance of the variables (Possible difficulties faced by women). The chi square results of the present study, are presented in the **Table-7**. Chi-square value for Preference for Offered Job Type 6.005 (0.423) was insignificant. Hence **NH-1** is not rejected. The Chi-square value for Health Issues, after

rejoining, was significant at 20.193 (0.000), **NH-2** is rejected. Chi-square value for Behavioral Changes, among employees, was insignificant at 4.510 (0.211). Hence **NH-3** is not rejected. Chi-square value for salary issues, rejoining, at 51.18 (0.026), was significant. Hence **NH-4** is rejected. Chi-square value, for Need for Skill Updating, at 47.500 (0.000), was significant. Hence **NH-5** is rejected.

## 9. Findings

The primary observations reflected numerous obstacles, faced by the respondents, despite considerable facilities provided by IT companies in India. Prominent among them were offering of lower skilled jobs and age discrimination, despite the substantial amount of experience, recorded by many respondents. Further, following the inferential testing of these obstacles, it was found that women often faced health issues, reduced salary scale and need for re-skilling, after coming back from career break. In the light of these arguments, the study found that **Stewart (2014)** supported reduced salary and need for re-skilling as relevant, since the need of the companies might change within the tenure of career break of employees. But the study, by **Younger et al., (2015)**, argued that women health issues were relevant only in some cases, like pregnancy or any severe disease.

## 10. Conclusion

Regarding other obstacles like preference for offered position, after career break or changed co-workers attitude, the study came up with similar responses, according to which these two factors were less commonly observed. Therefore, all-inclusive exploration of women's condition, after joining from career break, indicated that various types of difficulties were observed and they had significant impact

on women's career, as per their tenure of professional break.

## 11. Suggestions

In this scenario, IT based organizations need to ponder over the maximum utilization of the talent pool, developing separate policies for women taking career break but possessing considerable amount of experience (at least ten years), before taking a career break. Such a provision would help the organization to spend less time and money on training fresh talent and to gain maximum advantage in terms of profitability, through such talent and experience utilization. Moreover, companies must also strive to create a transparent and mutually beneficial selection and training process for such women employees so that their morale could be boosted and productivity was maximized.

## 12. Limitations

Due to geographical and financial constraints, many types of IT firms could not be included in the survey, which would have expanded the validity of the research more. Better perspective of HR Managers could not be gained due to time constraints. Gaining their perspective would have helped the Researcher to analyse the issue more deeply and draw a more accurate comparison of women employees' perceived difficulties and actual ones. It might also have helped in developing a better model of rehiring policy, for women employees, in the IT sector.

## 13. Scope for Further Research

Future studies on this subject can be conducted by taking into consideration HR Management's side of the issue and also directed towards other firms, to increase applicability of the research.

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**Table-1: Demographic Profile**

Factor	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	
24-29 Years	20
30-35 Years	10
36-42 Years	32
43-48 Years	10
Above 48 Years	28
<b>Work Exp. Pre-break</b>	
0-3 Years	20
4-7 Years	10
8-10 Years	32
11-13 Years	10
More than 13 Years	28
<b>Job Profile Pre-break</b>	
Software Developer	22
Testing / Quality Manager	12
Project Manager	28
Senior Leadership Position	12
Junior Executive	6
IT Infrastructure	20

**Source:** Primary Data

**Table-2: Reasons for Taking Career Break**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Higher Studies	6
Marriage	20
Spouse relocation	12
Pregnancy	14
Childcare	14
Eldercare	4
Pressure/Request from family	6
Lack of flexible working hour option	14
End of contract	4
Lack of growth opportunities	6

Source: Primary Data

**Table-3: Re-Skilling / Up-Skilling for Post-Joining**

<b>Duration of career break</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 3 Months	0
Less than a year	2
1-4 years	24
4-7 years	10
7-10 years	20
More than 10 years	44

Source: Primary Data

**Table-4: Barriers Faced during Post-Break Job Search**

<b>Post Break Job Search Barriers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Skills need updating</b>	
Strongly Disagree	42
Disagree	34
Agree	8
Strongly Agree	16
<b>Confidence</b>	
Strongly Disagree	14
Disagree	4
Agree	26
Strongly Agree	56
<b>Interview</b>	
Strongly Disagree	14
Disagree	6
Agree	48
Strongly Agree	32
<b>Age Discrimination</b>	
Strongly Disagree	26
Disagree	8
Agree	32
Strongly Agree	34

Source: Primary Data

**Table-5: Barriers of Post Re-Joining**

<b>Post Re-Joining Barriers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Childcare/lack of crèche facilities</b>	
Strongly Disagree	22
Disagree	14
Agree	12
Strongly Agree	52
<b>Confidence</b>	
Strongly Disagree	26
Disagree	6
Agree	14
Strongly Agree	54
<b>Interview</b>	
Strongly Disagree	12
Disagree	20
Agree	28
Strongly Agree	40
<b>Age Discrimination</b>	
Strongly Disagree	12
Disagree	20
Agree	28
Strongly Agree	40

Source: Primary Data

**Table-6: Possible Difficulties faced by Women**

<b>Possible Difficulties faced by Women</b>	<b>Time period of career break</b>			
	<b>3 to 6 months</b>	<b>6 to 12 months</b>	<b>1 to 2 years</b>	<b>3 to 5 years</b>
Preference for Offered Job Type	Number of responses: 14	Number of responses: 6	Number of responses: 17	Number of responses: 13
Health Issues after you rejoin				
Behavioral Changes among employees				
Salary issues after you rejoin				
Need for Skill Updation				

Source: Primary Data

**Table-7: Chi-Square Test**

<b>Possible Difficulties faced by Women</b>	<b>Value of Chi-square</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
Preference for Offered Job Type	6.005	0.423
Health Issues after you rejoin	20.193	0.000
Behavioral Changes among employees	4.510	0.211
Salary issues after you rejoin	51.18	0.026
Need for Skill Updating	47.500	0.000

Source: Primary Data using SPSS 21.0