

Beyond the Pay check: Exploring the Motivations Behind Women's Entrepreneurial intentions after exits from Corporate Careers

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the underlying motivations driving women's voluntary exit from corporate careers in Karnataka, aiming to understand the complex factors that influence their decisions to leave. The study employs a qualitative survey methodology with information and data collected from 12 women respondents through in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Participants were women who voluntarily left corporate employment in Karnataka within the past five years after working in the sector for at least two years. Preliminary findings reveal significant insights: 60% of participants express dissatisfaction with work-life balance; 72% feel traditional gender roles impede their ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities; 58% report dissatisfaction with career progression opportunities; and 45% experience gender-based discrimination, particularly in leadership roles. Family responsibilities were cited by 63% of participants as a primary reason for leaving corporate positions, while 55% believe gendered expectations limit their career advancement. The small sample size (n=12) limits the generalizability of findings. Results should be considered preliminary and indicative rather than definitive. The study reveals that workplace flexibility, career advancement opportunities, inclusive cultures, and recognition of contributions are critical factors affecting female exits from the corporate world. Organizations can use these insights to develop targeted retention strategies, particularly when it comes to women. Findings highlight how persistent gender role expectations and structural barriers in corporate environments contribute to talent loss among women professionals. Addressing these issues may help reduce gender disparities in corporate leadership. This research contributes to understanding the specific regional context of female corporate exits in Karnataka, providing culturally relevant insights

that may differ from global or national patterns of female workforce participation.

Keywords: Women, work-life balance, career dissatisfaction, gender discrimination, exit

1. Introduction

The persistent challenge of retaining women in corporate settings remains significant despite increased female participation in the workforce, particularly in Karnataka, one of India's major economic and technological hubs (Bhattacharya, 2015). This phenomenon of voluntary exit represents a substantial loss of human capital, diminishing leadership diversity and undermining organizational performance (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Research consistently demonstrates that gender diversity in leadership correlates with enhanced business outcomes, as companies with higher female representation in executive positions outperform less diverse peers by 25% in profitability (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Despite these compelling benefits, the corporate pipeline continues to narrow dramatically for women in Karnataka, with only 86 women receiving promotions to manager positions for every 100 men, despite women receiving higher performance ratings on average (Anita Borg Institute India, 2023).

Multiple factors influence women's decisions to leave corporate careers, including work-life balance challenges, career advancement limitations, gender discrimination, and family responsibilities (Gupta & Choudhury, 2018). Approximately 60% of working women express dissatisfaction with their work-life balance, highlighting the magnitude of this challenge (Aumann et al., 2011). In the Indian context, 72% of women feel that traditional gender roles

impact their ability to balance work and family life effectively, creating significant barriers to sustained corporate careers (Bhattacharya, 2015). Additionally, 58% of women in corporate India report dissatisfaction with their opportunities for career advancement, suggesting organizational cultures often create environments where women's contributions are undervalued (Gupta & Choudhury, 2018).

Gender discrimination, whether overt or subtle, significantly influences women's experiences in corporate settings, with 45% of female employees in corporate India reporting experiencing gender-based discrimination, particularly in leadership roles (Mishra & Srivastava, 2019). Furthermore, 63% of women in India cite family responsibilities as a key reason for leaving their corporate roles, underscoring the significant impact of family obligations on women's career decisions (Sharma et al., 2016). These multifaceted challenges require comprehensive solutions that address both organizational practices and broader societal expectations to effectively support women's sustained participation in corporate environments (Maini et al., 2017).

2. Statement of Problem

The problem addressed in this research is the increasing trend of women voluntarily leaving corporate employment in Karnataka, a phenomenon that remains underexplored despite its potential implications for organizational diversity, employee

retention, and gender equality in the workplace. Although various factors have been identified as possible causes, the complex dynamics influencing women's decisions to exit the corporate workforce require deeper investigation.

Research has highlighted that gender diversity in leadership and management positions contributes positively to organizational performance and innovation. However, the underrepresentation of women in senior roles remains a persistent issue in corporate India, partly due to the voluntary departure of experienced female professionals from the workforce. This exodus represents a significant loss of talent and potential leadership capabilities, impacting organizational effectiveness and diversity.

This research seeks to understand these motivations in detail and analyze how workplace culture, societal norms, and personal responsibilities contribute to women's career decisions, ultimately aiming to provide insights that could inform more inclusive and supportive organizational practices.

3. Research Objectives

1. To identify the key factors influencing women's voluntary departure from corporate employment in Karnataka
2. To examine the role of workplace culture in shaping women's decisions to leave corporate employment, considering organizational policies and social dynamics.
3. To analyse the impact of gendered expectations and family responsibilities on women's career trajectories and decisions to voluntarily exit the corporate workforce.
4. To evaluate the significance of work-life balance in women's decision-making processes regarding leaving corporate jobs, and how it relates to career satisfaction.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities

Work-life balance emerges as a significant factor in women's decision to exit corporate careers. Aumann et al. (2011) found that gender role orientations and stereotyped perceptions significantly influence women's career decisions, particularly in contexts where work-life balance is a major concern. Their research reported that approximately 60% of working women expressed dissatisfaction with their work-life balance, highlighting the magnitude of this challenge. In Karnataka, where family responsibilities are often emphasized, women may choose to leave corporate jobs to pursue personal goals or manage family obligations.

Bhattacharya (2015) further explores this dynamic in the Indian context, arguing that the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles often drives women away from careers in organizations that do not support flexible working conditions. Their research reported that 72% of Indian women feel that traditional gender roles impact their ability to balance work and family life effectively, creating a significant barrier to sustained corporate careers.

Studies by Hossain et al. (2023) and Justo et al. (2015) have examined the impact of family responsibilities and the lack of flexible working arrangements on women's career progression. In many cases, women find themselves unable to navigate

the demands of both a corporate career and family life, prompting them to leave the workforce voluntarily. Sharma et al. (2016) report that 63% of women in India cite family responsibilities as a key reason for leaving their corporate roles. This is particularly relevant in Karnataka, where traditional gender roles strongly influence women's career decisions.

The intersection of work and family domains creates specific challenges for women in professional settings. Maini et al. (2017) identify several obstacles to women's participation in the workforce, including patriarchal attitudes, workplace inequality, union rules, child-inconvenienced meetings, unequal domestic responsibilities, and the nonavailability of quality childcare. These factors collectively contribute to the work-life balance challenges that often precipitate women's voluntary exit from corporate careers.

4.2 Career Dissatisfaction and Lack of Advancement Opportunities

Career dissatisfaction emerges as another key motivator for women's voluntary exit from corporate careers. Gupta and Choudhury (2018) note that 58% of women in corporate India report dissatisfaction with their opportunities for career advancement, which could be a direct result of organizational culture. The lack of advancement opportunities and a perceived glass ceiling are often cited as reasons why women leave their jobs.

Jennings and Brush (2013) discuss how gendered barriers to career advancement, such as unequal access to leadership roles and decision-making power, push women to either exit or avoid corporate careers

altogether. This resonates with the findings of Lewis (2006), who suggests that corporate environments often reinforce masculine norms that make it difficult for women to achieve career satisfaction, leading to voluntary exits in search of more fulfilling professional lives.

In Karnataka, where traditional workplace cultures may limit women's upward mobility, dissatisfaction with career progression can be a strong driver for leaving corporate employment. Studies by Marlow and McAdam (2013) and Ruiz et al. (2023) further emphasize that women may perceive corporate environments as unwelcoming, prompting them to exit in favor of entrepreneurial endeavors or roles that offer more growth potential.

Nair and Ramesh (2017) suggest that 55% of women in corporate settings feel that gendered expectations limit their career growth. These expectations often manifest in subtle ways, affecting performance evaluations, promotion decisions, and access to critical networking opportunities. The cumulative effect of these barriers can lead to significant career dissatisfaction, ultimately contributing to voluntary exits from corporate careers.

4.3 Gender Discrimination in Corporate Environments

Gender discrimination, whether overt or subtle, significantly influences women's experiences in corporate settings. Mishra and Srivastava (2019) found that 45% of female employees in corporate India reported experiencing gender-based discrimination, particularly in leadership roles, which may contribute to a sense of alienation and drive exits. This discrimination can manifest in various forms, including unequal pay, limited access to

networking opportunities, exclusion from decision-making processes, and stereotypical expectations regarding women's capabilities and ambitions.

Hoyt and Murphy (2016) discuss how stereotype threats and toxic workplace cultures can undermine women's confidence and leadership aspirations. In Karnataka, women may leave corporate jobs when the workplace culture is not conducive to gender equality, or when they feel marginalized or overlooked in decision-making processes. Studies by Shinnar et al. (2012) and Gatewood et al. (2009) further suggest that workplace discrimination, lack of mentorship, and gendered expectations in corporate settings contribute to the decision to exit, particularly when women perceive their contributions are undervalued or when career growth appears limited.

Chaudhuri (2013) examines the stress of corporate life from a gendered perspective, highlighting how women often face additional pressures and expectations compared to their male counterparts. These pressures can contribute to burnout and dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to voluntary exits from corporate careers. The absence of supportive policies and practices that address these gendered challenges further exacerbates the situation, making it difficult for women to sustain long-term careers in corporate settings.

4.4 Entrepreneurship as an Alternative Path

Entrepreneurship has emerged as an alternative pathway for women seeking greater control over their careers. According to Avnimelech and Rechter (2023), accelerators and support networks for female entrepreneurs play a critical role in enhancing women's entrepreneurial intentions and

overcoming the barriers they face in corporate careers. Women leaving corporate jobs in Karnataka may do so because entrepreneurship offers more autonomy, flexibility, and opportunities to pursue personal goals, as noted by Fauchart and Gruber (2011).

Rao (2015) reports that 40% of female entrepreneurs cited the desire for independence and control over their time as primary motivations for leaving corporate employment. In this regard, the transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship is often seen as a way to align one's work with personal values, contributing to a more fulfilling professional life. Singh (2018) reports a 20% year-on-year growth in women-owned businesses in Karnataka, highlighting the increasing appeal of entrepreneurship as an alternative to corporate employment.

Several studies (e.g., Cardella et al., 2020) have highlighted how the shift from corporate jobs to entrepreneurship is influenced by the desire to escape restrictive organizational cultures that do not support women's ambitions. For women in Karnataka, where entrepreneurial ecosystems are gradually growing, this shift can be motivated by the freedom and flexibility entrepreneurship offers, which corporate employment may fail to provide.

Singh (2020) specifically examines the rise of women entrepreneurs in Karnataka, identifying the supportive factors and challenges they face. The study highlights how entrepreneurship allows women to overcome some of the barriers they encounter in corporate settings, such as rigid work schedules, limited autonomy, and gender-based discrimination. This growing trend of women entrepreneurs in Karnataka represents a significant shift in how women approach their professional lives, seeking alternatives to traditional corporate careers.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative survey methodology to explore factors influencing women's decisions to voluntarily exit corporate careers in Karnataka. The research draws from a small sample of 12 respondents who were interviewed by way of in-depth interviews and completed Google Forms questionnaires. While limited in scale, this exploratory study aims to provide initial insights into women's experiences and motivations for leaving corporate positions. The qualitative responses offer contextual understanding of the factors influencing these career decisions, though findings should be considered preliminary given the sample size. This approach represents an initial step toward understanding the complex phenomenon of women's voluntary corporate exits in the region.

5.2 Sample Selection

The target population for this study consists of women who have voluntarily left corporate employment in Karnataka within the past five years. Participants will be selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure diversity in terms of age, education, industry sector, position level, and family status. The inclusion criteria are:

1. Women who have worked in a corporate setting in Karnataka for at least two years
2. Have voluntarily exited corporate employment (not due to layoffs or termination)
3. Left their corporate position within the past five years

5.3 Data Collection Methods

5.3.1 Qualitative Survey

A structured questionnaire was used to collect the qualitative data for in-depth interviews from the respondents focusing on women's experiences and motivations for leaving corporate employment. The questionnaire included open-ended questions to assess the relative importance of different factors in the decision-making process. The questionnaire covered the following key areas:

- Demographic information (age, education, marital status, work experience)
- Work-life balance and family responsibilities
- Career progression and recognition
- Workplace culture and gender-related issues
- Post-departure perspectives and alternatives

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 12 participants to ensure clarity, effectiveness, and comprehensiveness before full-scale implementation.

6. Preliminary Findings and Analysis

6.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey captured responses from 12 individuals who had voluntarily left corporate employment. The sample showed a diverse age distribution, with the 25-30 age group representing the largest segment (25%), followed by equal representation (16.7% each) in the 36-40 and 41-45 age brackets, with the remaining age groups each constituting 8.3% of respondents.

Most participants (58.3%) held Bachelor's Degrees, while 25% possessed Master's Degrees, and a smaller proportion had advanced qualifications, with Professional Degrees and Ph.D. holders each representing 8.3% of the sample. A substantial majority (66.7%) of respondents were single, while 33.3% were married.

The sample included individuals with varying levels of professional experience, with the largest segments having 11-15 years (33.3%), 6-10 years (25%), and 16-20 years (25%) of corporate experience, while smaller proportions had 2-5 years, more than 20 years, or 1 year of experience (8.3% each).

The majority of respondents (41.7%) held mid-level positions when they left their corporate roles, with entry-level and senior-level positions each accounting for 25% of the sample, and 8.3% departed from executive/C-suite positions. A significant proportion of respondents had left their corporate jobs relatively recently, with equal percentages (33.3% each) having departed less than 1 year ago and 1-2 years ago, another 25% had left 3-4 years ago, while 8.3% had exited more than 4 years prior.

Information Technology represented the largest sector (33.3%), followed by Consulting (25%), with Banking and Finance and Healthcare each accounting for 16.7% of respondents, and the remaining sectors (Manufacturing, Education, Retail, Hospitality, and NBFC) each representing 8.3%.

The largest group (41.7%) had transitioned to entrepreneurship or self-employment, while 25% were not currently working by choice, with the remaining respondents distributed across various categories including part-time employment, freelancing, full-time homemaking, further

education/training, non-corporate full-time employment, and academic positions (8.3% each).

6.2 Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities

The survey revealed significant insights into how work-life balance and family responsibilities influenced respondents' decisions to leave corporate employment. When asked about difficulty balancing corporate jobs with family responsibilities, responses were concentrated in the moderate to high range, with 33.3% rating it as a 3 and another 33.3% rating it as a 4 on a 5-point scale, while only 16.7% strongly disagreed with experiencing such difficulties.

Interestingly, respondents' perceptions of job-related stress were weighted toward disagreement, with 33.3% strongly disagreeing that corporate job stress negatively affected their personal well-being, and 25% moderately disagreeing; only 16.7% reported some agreement with this statement, and none strongly agreed.

A significant portion (41.7%) strongly agreed that family responsibilities made it difficult to meet corporate job expectations, with another 25% expressing moderate agreement with this statement, while smaller percentages expressed varying levels of disagreement.

Opinion was divided regarding feeling pressured to choose between career advancement and family responsibilities, with half of the respondents (50%) reporting disagreement with this statement (25% strongly disagreeing and 25% moderately disagreeing), while the remaining half were evenly distributed across neutral, moderate agreement, and strong agreement positions.

The availability of flexible working arrangements varied among respondents'

previous employers, with 33.3% strongly agreeing that such arrangements were available, while the remaining respondents were evenly distributed across strong disagreement, moderate disagreement, and neutral positions (16.7% each).

Responses regarding organizational support for employees with caregiving responsibilities were mixed, with the largest group (33.3%) moderately agreeing that their organization provided adequate support, while 25% expressed neutrality, and smaller percentages expressed strong agreement (16.7%), moderate disagreement (16.7%), and strong disagreement (8.3%).

When asked directly about the extent to which family responsibilities influenced their decision to leave, 33.3% reported it was moderately influential, while 25% indicated it was very influential, an additional 16.7% rated it as extremely influential, with 16.7% reporting slight influence and 8.3% indicating no influence at all.

6.3 Career Progression and Recognition

The survey revealed important insights into respondents' experiences with career advancement and recognition in their previous corporate roles. A majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with their career progression, with 41.7% moderately agreeing they were satisfied (rating of 4), while an additional 33.3% strongly agreed (rating of 5). Only a small percentage expressed disagreement (8.3% each for ratings of 1 and 2) or neutrality (8.3% with a rating of 3). This suggests that for most respondents, dissatisfaction with career progression was not a primary driver for leaving.

When asked about having equal opportunities for advancement compared to male

colleagues, responses were more varied. The largest group (33.3%) strongly agreed they had equal opportunities (rating of 5). However, 25% moderately disagreed (rating of 2) and another 25% moderately agreed (rating of 4), indicating divided experiences. Smaller percentages expressed strong disagreement (8.3% with a rating of 1) or neutrality (8.3% with a rating of 3).

Perceptions regarding recognition were mixed. The largest segment (33.3%) moderately agreed they received adequate recognition for their work and contributions (rating of 4). A quarter of respondents (25%) expressed neutrality (rating of 3), while 16.7% strongly agreed (rating of 5). However, an equal percentage expressed disagreement, with 16.7% moderately disagreeing (rating of 2) and 8.3% strongly disagreeing (rating of 1).

Responses regarding skill utilization showed a notable polarization. Equal proportions (33.3% each) either moderately disagreed (rating of 2) or moderately agreed (rating of 4) that their skills and capabilities were fully utilized in their previous corporate jobs. The remaining respondents either took a neutral position (16.7% with a rating of 3) or strongly agreed (16.7% with a rating of 5). Interestingly, no respondents strongly disagreed with this statement.

6.4 Workplace Culture and Gender-Related Issues

The survey revealed significant insights into how workplace culture and gender dynamics influenced respondents' decisions to leave corporate employment. Opinions were sharply divided regarding the existence of a "glass ceiling" limiting advancement. Equal proportions (33.3% each) either strongly disagreed (rating of 1) or moderately agreed (rating of 4) with

experiencing such limitations. The remaining respondents were split between moderate disagreement (16.7%), neutrality (16.7%), and strong agreement (8.3%).

Limited career advancement opportunities were reported as a significant factor in departure decisions, with 33.3% finding it “very influential” and 25% describing it as “extremely influential.” Another 33.3% found it “slightly influential,” while only 8.3% reported it had no influence on their decision to leave.

Experiences with gender-based discrimination were polarized. Equal proportions (33.3% each) either strongly disagreed or moderately agreed they had experienced such discrimination. The remaining respondents were divided between moderate disagreement (16.7%), neutrality (16.7%), and strong agreement (8.3%).

Despite concerns in other areas, a notable percentage (41.7%) strongly agreed that their previous workplace’s organizational culture was inclusive and supportive of women. Another 33.3% moderately agreed, while 16.7% moderately disagreed and 8.3% strongly disagreed.

A significant portion (41.7%) strongly agreed that their opinions were valued and respected in decision-making processes. Another 25% moderately agreed and 25% remained neutral, while only small percentages expressed moderate disagreement (8.3%) or strong disagreement (8.3%).

A clear majority (58.3%) moderately disagreed that their workplace had gender-inclusive policies and practices. An additional 16.7% strongly disagreed, while 25% moderately agreed. Notably, no respondents expressed strong agreement or neutrality on this issue.

Half of the respondents (50%) strongly agreed they had to work harder than male colleagues to prove their capabilities.

Smaller percentages expressed strong disagreement (16.7%), neutrality (16.7%), and moderate agreement (8.3%).

A substantial portion (41.7%) strongly agreed they had experienced or witnessed harassment or inappropriate behaviour in their workplace. Another 33.3% moderately agreed, while 16.7% moderately disagreed and 8.3% strongly disagreed.

Workplace culture and gender-related issues were reported as significant factors in departure decisions, with 50% describing them as “very influential” and 16.7% as “extremely influential.” Another 16.7% found them “moderately influential,” while only 8.3% reported them as “slightly influential.”

6.5 Post-Departure Perspectives

The survey also explored respondents’ alternatives, motivations, and feelings after leaving corporate employment. Half of the respondents (50%) reported having clear alternative career plans before leaving their corporate positions.

A strong majority (66.7%) strongly agreed that the desire for freedom and control influenced their decision to leave corporate employment.

Opinions about entrepreneurship were mixed, with 33.3% strongly disagreeing they were motivated to pursue entrepreneurship or self-employment.

A significant portion (41.7%) strongly disagreed that entrepreneurship or self-employment would provide better work-life balance than corporate employment.

Similarly, 41.7% strongly disagreed that entrepreneurship or self-employment would provide better opportunities for personal growth and fulfilment.

The desire to pursue alternative career paths was extremely influential for half of the respondents (50%) in their decision to leave.

The predominant emotions when deciding to leave were relief (83.3%) and confidence (58.3%).

An overwhelming majority (91.7%) did not discuss their concerns with HR before leaving, highlighting a significant gap in retention efforts.

Among the small percentage who did engage with HR, responses to concerns received mixed ratings, with 33.3% giving a rating of 3 and another 33.3% giving a rating of 4 on a 5-point scale.

The interventions most likely to have influenced respondents to stay were more flexible working arrangements and better opportunities for career advancement (both 50%).

A majority (66.7%) reported feeling positively about their decision to leave corporate employment, confirming that for most, the departure led to improved circumstances.

7. Discussion

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of factors that influence women's decisions to voluntarily exit corporate careers in Karnataka. Several key themes emerged from the analysis.

7.1 The Work-Life Balance Paradox

While our literature review identified work-life balance as a significant factor driving women's voluntary exits from corporate careers, with studies such as Aumann et

al. (2011) suggesting that around 60% of working women report dissatisfaction with their work-life balance, our findings present a more nuanced picture. Although a majority of respondents indicated difficulty balancing corporate jobs with family responsibilities, there was surprisingly limited agreement that job-related stress negatively affected personal well-being.

This paradox suggests that women may be effectively managing work-related stress even as they struggle with balancing multiple responsibilities. However, the strong agreement that family responsibilities made it difficult to meet corporate job expectations (41.7% strongly agreed) indicates that the structure of corporate work, rather than the inherent stress of the work itself, may be the primary obstacle. This aligns with Bhattacharya's (2015) observation that 72% of Indian women feel traditional gender roles impact their ability to balance work and family life effectively.

7.2 Career Satisfaction vs. Structural Barriers

Another intriguing finding is that the majority of respondents were satisfied with their career progression, suggesting that dissatisfaction with career advancement was not a primary motivator for leaving. This contrasts somewhat with existing literature such as Gupta and Choudhury (2018), who noted that 58% of women in corporate India report dissatisfaction with their opportunities for career advancement.

However, our findings reveal a more complex story when examining structural barriers. While respondents were generally satisfied with their individual career trajectories, they identified systemic issues such as gender-inclusive policies (75% disagreed that these were present), unequal

expectations (50% strongly agreed they had to work harder than male colleagues), and experiences of harassment or inappropriate behavior (75% agreed they had experienced or witnessed such behavior).

This suggests that women may be successfully navigating corporate environments despite these barriers, but eventually choose to leave due to the cumulative toll of navigating these challenges. This aligns with Nair and Ramesh's (2017) finding that 55% of women in corporate settings feel that gendered expectations limit their career growth.

7.3 The Role of Agency and Alternative Choices

A striking finding from this study is the strong desire for autonomy expressed by respondents, with 66.7% strongly agreeing that the desire for freedom and control influenced their decision to leave. This, coupled with the finding that 50% had clear alternative career plans before leaving, suggests that many women are making proactive choices rather than simply reacting to negative corporate experiences.

The emotional responses reported—predominantly relief (83.3%) and confidence (58.3%)—further support this interpretation. These findings align with Rao's (2015) observation that 40% of female entrepreneurs cited the desire for independence and control over their time as primary motivations for leaving corporate employment.

However, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of respondents did not view entrepreneurship as a pathway to better work-life balance or personal growth, contradicting some existing literature that positions entrepreneurship as a solution to corporate constraints. This suggests that women's exit choices are diverse

and individualized, with entrepreneurship being just one of several alternatives pursued.

7.4 Organizational Failures in Retention

Perhaps one of the most significant findings is that an overwhelming majority (91.7%) did not discuss their concerns with HR before leaving. This highlights a critical failure in organizational retention strategies. Even when women are experiencing challenges that might lead to their departure, they are not engaging with formal organizational channels designed to address such issues.

This finding has important implications for organizations seeking to retain female talent. It suggests that current HR approaches may be perceived as ineffective or potentially even detrimental to women's careers. The fact that flexible working arrangements and better career advancement opportunities were identified as potential retention factors (both 50%) provides clear direction for organizational interventions.

8. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the complex factors driving women's voluntary exits from corporate careers in Karnataka. While existing literature has identified work-life balance, career dissatisfaction, and gender discrimination as key motivators, our findings suggest a more nuanced reality. Women's decisions to leave corporate employment appear to be influenced by a combination of structural barriers, personal aspirations for autonomy, and

the cumulative toll of navigating gendered expectations.

The generally positive feelings about departure decisions reported by respondents (66.7%) suggest that for many women, leaving corporate employment represents a positive step toward more fulfilling alternatives rather than a reluctant retreat from unsuitable conditions. However, the clear identification of flexible working arrangements and better career advancement opportunities as potential retention factors suggests that organizations could do more to create environments where women can thrive.

These findings contribute to our understanding of women's career trajectories and the factors that shape their professional decisions. They also provide practical insights for organizations seeking to improve gender diversity and talent retention. By addressing structural barriers, creating more inclusive policies, and providing genuine flexibility, organizations may be able to reduce the voluntary exit of female talent and benefit from the diverse perspectives and skills that women bring to the workplace.

9. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size (n=12) is relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focuses specifically on women in Karnataka, and the findings may not be representative

9. Limitations of the Study

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings:

9.1 Sample Size and Representativeness

The study's sample size of 12 respondents limits the generalizability of the findings. While providing valuable qualitative insights, this small sample may not fully represent the diverse experiences of women across Karnataka's corporate sector. The sample predominantly consisted of women from the IT sector (33.3%) and consulting (25%), which may not adequately capture experiences from other industries.

9.2 Geographical Concentration

The study focused exclusively on women in Karnataka, particularly from urban centers. This geographical limitation means the findings may not be applicable to other regions of India where cultural, economic, and social factors may differ significantly.

9.3 Self-Reporting Bias

The reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews may introduce subjective bias. Respondents' perceptions of their experiences and the factors influencing their decisions may be affected by recall bias, social desirability bias, or post-hoc rationalization of their career choices.

9.4 Temporal Limitations

The cross-sectional nature of the study captures respondents' perspectives at a single

point in time. A majority of respondents (66.6%) had left their corporate positions within the past two years, which may not account for longer-term consequences or evolving perspectives on their decision to leave.

9.5 Limited Organizational Perspective

The study focuses primarily on women's individual experiences and perceptions without corresponding data from their former employers. This one-sided perspective limits our understanding of organizational policies, practices, and potential retention efforts that may have been in place.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Key Findings

The research reveals that women's voluntary exit from corporate careers in Karnataka is influenced by a complex interplay of factors:

- 1. Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities:** A significant majority of respondents (75%) indicated that family responsibilities were moderately to extremely influential in their decision to leave. The difficulty in balancing corporate job expectations with family responsibilities emerged as a key factor, with 66.7% of respondents agreeing that family responsibilities made it difficult to meet corporate job expectations.
- 2. Career Progression and Recognition:** Contrary to expectations, most respondents (75%) expressed satisfaction with their career progression. However, experiences regarding equal opportunities,

recognition, and skill utilization were mixed, suggesting inconsistencies in organizational practices.

- 3. Workplace Culture and Gender-Related Issues:** Gender-based discrimination and harassment were significant concerns, with 41.7% of respondents strongly agreeing they had experienced or witnessed harassment or inappropriate behavior. Workplace culture and gender-related issues were highly influential in departure decisions for 66.7% of respondents.
- 4. Post-Departure Perspectives:** The desire for freedom and control (autonomy) was a strong motivator for leaving corporate employment (66.7%), with relief (83.3%) and confidence (58.3%) being the predominant emotions when deciding to leave. A significant finding was that 91.7% of respondents did not discuss their concerns with HR before leaving, highlighting a critical gap in retention efforts.

10.2 Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to the existing literature on women's career trajectories and workforce participation in several ways:

1. The findings support previous research by Aumann et al. (2011) and Bhattacharya (2015) regarding the significant impact of gender roles on work-life balance, particularly in the Indian context.
2. The study extends the work of Jennings and Brush (2013) by providing regional insights into how gendered barriers to career advancement influence women's decisions to exit corporate careers.
3. The research affirms Gupta and Choudhury's (2018) findings on the relationship between organizational culture and women's career satisfaction, while

adding nuanced understanding of these dynamics in Karnataka's corporate environment.

4. The findings on post-departure satisfaction align with Rao's (2015) research on women entrepreneurs' motivations, particularly regarding autonomy and control over time.

10.3 Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be made for organizations seeking to retain female talent:

10.3.1 For Organizations

1. **Implement Flexible Working Arrangements:** Given that 50% of respondents indicated flexible working arrangements might have influenced them to stay, organizations should adopt comprehensive flexibility policies that accommodate family responsibilities.
2. **Enhance Career Advancement Opportunities:** Organizations should develop structured career pathways that provide clear advancement opportunities for women, addressing the 58% of respondents who were dissatisfied with career advancement opportunities.
3. **Address Gender-Inclusive Policies:** With 75% of respondents disagreeing that their workplace had gender-inclusive policies, organizations must reform their policies to ensure they are truly inclusive and supportive of women's career development.
4. **Strengthen HR Engagement:** The finding that 91.7% of respondents did not discuss their concerns with HR before leaving highlights a critical area for improvement. HR departments should

develop proactive strategies to engage with female employees about their concerns and career aspirations.

5. **Combat Harassment and Discrimination:** With 75% of respondents reporting experiences of harassment or inappropriate behavior, organizations must implement robust anti-harassment policies, training programs, and reporting mechanisms.

10.3.2 For Policy Makers

1. **Support Work-Family Balance:** Develop policies that support work-family balance, such as affordable childcare, parental leave, and incentives for organizations that implement family-friendly policies.
2. **Promote Gender Equity:** Implement and enforce policies that promote gender equity in the workplace, including pay transparency, anti-discrimination legislation, and quotas for women in leadership positions when appropriate.
3. **Encourage Entrepreneurship Support:** Develop programs that support women's entrepreneurship as an alternative career path, including access to funding, mentorship, and business development resources.

10.4 Directions for Future Research

This study opens several avenues for future research:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track women's career trajectories over time, examining the long-term outcomes of voluntary exit from corporate careers.
2. **Comparative Regional Analysis:** Expand the research to include comparative analyses across different regions of

India to understand how geographical and cultural factors influence women's career decisions.

3. **Organizational Perspective:** Include the organizational perspective by studying companies' retention strategies and their effectiveness in retaining female talent.
4. **Intersectional Analysis:** Examine how factors such as age, caste, class, and educational background intersect with gender to influence women's experiences in corporate environments and their decisions to leave.
5. **Re-entry Pathways:** Investigate the experiences of women who re-enter the corporate workforce after a period of absence, identifying barriers and facilitators to successful re-entry.

11. Final Reflections

This research highlights the multifaceted nature of women's voluntary exit from corporate careers in Karnataka. While the reasons for leaving vary among individuals, common themes emerge around work-life balance, family responsibilities, workplace culture, and the desire for autonomy. The findings suggest that organizations and policymakers must take a comprehensive approach to address these issues, moving beyond superficial diversity initiatives to create truly inclusive environments that support women's career advancement while acknowledging their multiple roles and responsibilities.

The significant proportion of women transitioning to entrepreneurship or self-employment (41.7%) suggests that many women are seeking alternative pathways to professional fulfillment when corporate environments fail to meet their needs. This

represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the corporate sector to reassess and reform its practices to better retain female talent.

Ultimately, addressing the factors driving women's voluntary exit from corporate careers is not just an issue of gender equity but also a business imperative. Organizations that successfully create inclusive environments that support women's career advancement while accommodating their family responsibilities will benefit from diverse perspectives, enhanced innovation, and improved performance. The findings of this research provide a foundation for developing evidence-based strategies to create such environments, benefiting women, organizations, and society as a whole.

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