

Barriers to Women Empowerment in the Context of Epistemological Diversity

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Abstract:

Background: Over the decades, women's presence in the workforce, has undergone a transformation, dramatically. This marked the glass ceilings are being broken through in spite of existing epistemological prejudice. Such gender discrimination causes women to fight their way uphill, coupled with the dual role the women have to perform in India due to existing social norms. The factors acting as barriers to empowering of women have been identified in the form of a 3-dimensional framework and their cause and relationship have been analyzed in this study, along with the epistemological influence on society because of prejudice towards women.

Materials and Methods: In this perspective, a quantitative study has been used, by resorting to random probability sampling of 170 respondents from both genders through a questionnaire. Multiple Regression technique has been used to predict women empowerment based on the relationship between Women's representation and factors identified as barriers.

Results: The values of coefficient for each independent variable is in a positive direction. 'P' value is less than 0.05 and significantly rejected Null Hypothesis and declares as no correlation between a dependent and independent variable. Result confirm the three-dimension framework created is truly, a good model and the sample results confirm as that of the population.

Conclusion: Balancing the career and family becomes a significant barrier, as women are expected to perform Work-life balances is important for women empowerment as women-centric or women-oriented policies give comfort and aid women in career advancement.

Key Word: Women empowerment; Career advancement; Epistemology; Women subjugation.

Date of Submission: 25-02-2022

Date of Acceptance: 06-03-2022

I. Introduction

Women often have to continue to balance their career-related work along with domestic chores and their other responsibilities. Such idea of engaging herself in multiple roles, or performing multitasking has become an accepted social norm (Monika & Michael, 2015). India realised the need to formulate and apply policies that are women-friendly, can attract and ensure women participate actively to fulfill their aspirations in all spheres of life. As such, gender equality as an important principle has been enshrined in our Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Directive Principles, Fundamental Duties and also in Fundamental rights. Our Constitution granted equality to women, and also the Indian states have been empowered to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Over the decades, indeed, women's presence in the workforce has undergone a transformation, dramatically. This marked the glass ceilings are being broken through, resulting in a change in advancing women's careers with the overall pace of the change (Meenakshi Lohani & Loai Aburaida, 2017). Contemporary organizations have meta-morphed themselves to meet the challenges due to globalisation, the development of IT technology and recent economic and social crisis. In such an environmental scenario, another significant development is of the significant rise of number of women as workforce, in demographic structure (Andric, 2015). Yet, there seems to be a significant gender disparity and women have to fight their way uphill towards and are often tasked to take upon numerous roles and responsibilities, juggling between personal and professional lives (Sartori, 2020).

Problem statement

To recruit and retain a talent pool of women, requires many changes in women's work-life balance and domestic issues that are important to women. Epistemology, a philosophy of science that studies the societal influence in our conceptions of knowledge, practices (Rosen & Kelly, 2020) and justification had identified, how certain practices with dominant conceptions, knowledge attribution, and justification disadvantage women and women's position. This philosophy treats women as a subordinated group and strives to reform them to

serve the interests of these groups, impacting women's lives and making careers remain somewhat blurred (Neil et al., 2008) .

Objectives

The objectives of this research is to study the epistemological influence on the society in the form of prejudice towards women and also study influence of various government policies and its positive effect on women career advancement and empowerment.

II. Literature Review

There is a strong consensus in society today to consider women or realise gender sensitivity into account in multiple ways, due to sheer neglect of this category along with other societal ills, on the name of age-old beliefs, traditions, customs and turning blind eye to this gender concerns (Alsharif, 2018). Existing literature has examined contextual factors and diverse individuals to get hindsight into factors that hinder women's career advancement and their access to higher decision-making roles. The literature also examined the work opportunities, career progression and experiences of women in this context. The women wish to pursue a career, experience work-life conflict due to their strong commitment towards family and associated responsibilities. The Challenges at home and in society do get carried into the working environment. Hence, it is important to find a solution to such problems and prevent them from becoming barriers (Radhika, 2019). This resulted into the lower participation of women in taking careers as full-time. As India is progressing in all economic fronts, there is an urgent need for the country to pay attention to human development, which includes women empowerment socially. The country's future importantly hinges on ensuring that forthcoming generations are adequately qualified, represented and able to make way for the development platform (Seema & Antra, 2020).

Although women continue to have generally lower career aspirations than do comparably talented males (Leung et al., 1994), there is some indication that women's aspirations have substantially increased over the past several decades (Gerstein et al., 1988). This reflects that it will be more integrative and promising to capture the broader complexity related to perceptions that surround women-related activities, aspirations, demonstrating certain aspects of women's aspirations, linking to both socio-cultural perceptions and individual development factors (Susan & Anne, 1997). As a result of such cultural perceptions, certain branches of education or professions are considered as masculine, by branding and channelizing psychologically to orient the women to restrict to those careers only. Such careers are perceived to be not suitable for women, thus paving the way to occupational segregation in the past. But conditions have improved and attitudinal changes have taken place to good, to accommodate the women in such areas of the profession, perceived earlier as entry barriers (Evetts, 1998).

Such perceptions led to the convergence of careers to women with high centrality of the careers. Such restricted openings often cannot fulfill the complete aspirations of the women, envisaging a change to achieve genuine and realistic equality in all aspects of life, to prevail over the stereotype of careers (White, 1995). Further, family factors can limit a woman's aspirations to break through the glass floor, because of limitations created of her availability and her mobility (Stevanovic, 2012).

Existing prejudices against women in society

According to its proponents, socially constructed norms and conceptions of gender-specific interests and experiences on the production of knowledge influences societal status of women. Such historical restrictions on women has affected the direction and asserts that women are inferior to men, and subordinated to men. Women faced such challenges, obstacles and are not treated as equals when they aspire to rise high in the sphere of their career (Anderson E. , 1995). Proponents of traditional values usually modelled with role of women as wife associated with a married life, living in the same household got married to, and raise the children. The role or duties of women as spouse or mother is made inseparable (Anderson., 2004) and the key feature of this model is the historically rooted cultural belief that portrays women to confine to home than in the workplace or in the public sphere (Mariana Kitsa & Iryna Mudra., 2019).

Gender inequality against women advancement

By mechanism, men are considered as higher in social status with privileged benefits producing behavioural differences. According to Social role theory, shared expectations are applied differentially to women than to men highlighting a very wider set of expectancies from women than men and also greater expectations than those associated with status (Eagly, 1995). Women's lives are controlled on the name of traditions and customs, those are centuries old and implied boundaries to women with denial of rights, opportunities. Such equality suppression for women on the basis of gender leaving men folk free from any such restrictions disadvantaged women for career advancement (Shastri, 2014). Assigning family devotion as schema to women, but not to men, made women accountable with the primary responsibilities like housework, childrearing and holds them accountable. Women have been oriented with such deep-seated ideologies making

them centric to work and family, which often derails their careers, thus making women face a conundrum with respect to career advancement (Irene et al., 2019). The resultant of discrimination is women had nothing to do in their life except doing household chores and serving the entire family (Irene Padavic et al., 2020).

Government policies on women empowerment in India

The Constitution of India grants equality to women and empowered the States to initiate measures towards positive discrimination favouring the women and neutralise cumulative disadvantages in the areas educational, socio – economic fronts faced by them. However, a wide gap exists still, despite goals have been enunciated in our Constitution, through policies and legislation, also through various plans, programmes and related mechanisms on one hand and on ground reality of the status of women in India, on the other (Saba & Seema ., 2015). Government policy of creating Self Help groups created a lasting impact on improving the standards and the lives of the women especially in the rural areas. They developed their skills and increased their abilities in several productive activities (Geeta, 2016). Various Government policies, regulations have formed with the sole aim to protect the rights of women and safeguard their legal entitlements. The nation realised that empowering of women would indicate ensuring women to have incremental self – esteem, to be highly self-reliant, economically independent. An empowered women is more confident, to face difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities (Aritra & Rimi ., 2015). Important schemes of government in safeguarding women’s rights are given in below Table 1.

Table 1. Important schemes by Government of India

S No	Scheme	Description of scheme
1	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme	For girl child education
2	One Stop Centre Scheme	To support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace.
3	Women Helpline Scheme	The Scheme of Universalisation of Women Helpline is intended to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence.
4	Ujjawala	A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation.
5	Working Women Hostel	To promote safety and accommodation for the working women along with the daycare facility for their children, in urban, semi-urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist. Also to assist projects for the establishment of new hostel buildings or an extension of existing hostel buildings.
6	SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)	To provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to women and girls rendered homeless due to family discord.
7	Nari Shakti Puraskar	Nari Shakti Puraskar is an annual award given by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to individual women or to institutions that work towards the cause of women empowerment.
8	Mahila police Volunteers	To serve as a public-police interface in order to fight crime against women. The broad mandate is to report incidences of violence against women such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry harassment and violence faced by women in public spaces. She will act as a role model for the community.
9	Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)	to empower rural women through community participation and to create an environment in which they realize their full potential.
10	NIRBHAYA	Set up a dedicated fund called 'Nirbhaya Fund' for implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security for women in the country.

(Source : Ministry of Women & Child development, Government of India)

Theoretical frame work.

The challenges and barriers which women face in the career or outside the world often, impact the aspirations of the women in taking up active career option. These factors can be viewed as the essential prerequisites to motivate empowering behaviours in women's life or work (Mosedale, 2005). A Three dimensional frame work to understand the barriers to the career path of women has been frame (figure 1).

Figure 1

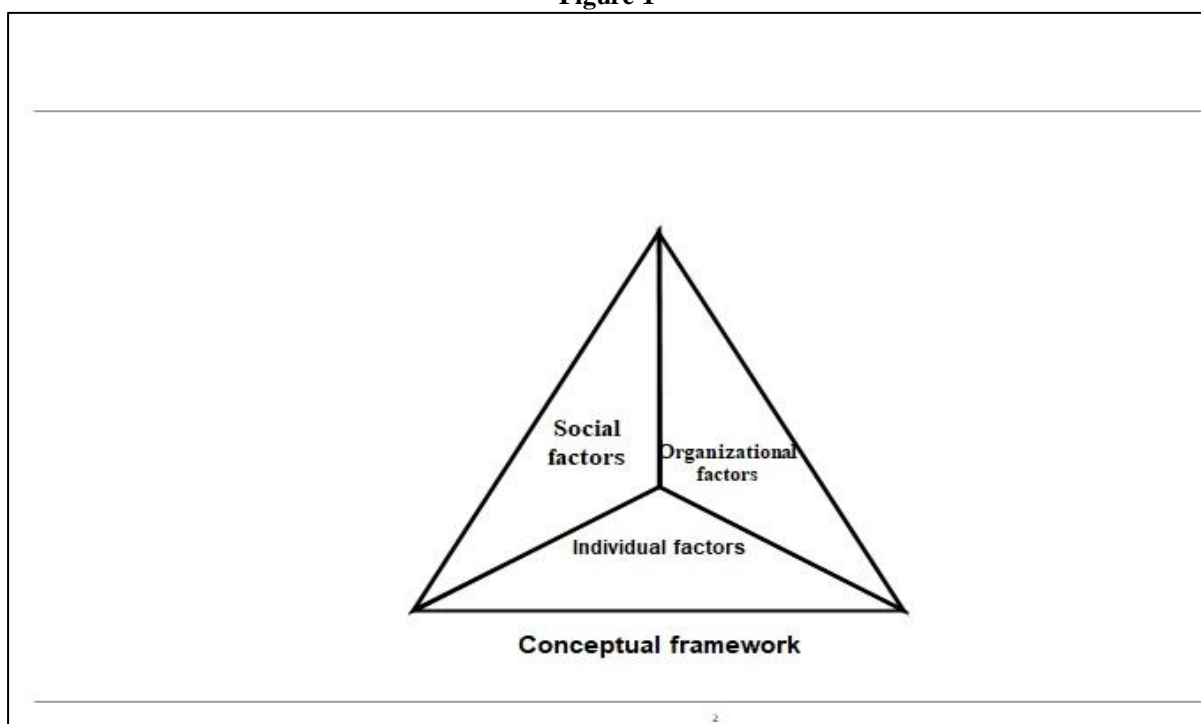


Figure 1: Conceptual frame work of factors affecting Women empowerment

Individual factors.

Individuality empowers women for critical consciousness to determine choices, without any coercion or being under duress. Such individuals will have right to access the opportunities and also access to resources, to use those opportunities (Cornwal, 2016). The important parameters that determine individuality is education as it gives confidence and knowledge. Another parameter is 'avoid subjugation', to not to get subjected to coercion. Health and hygiene are also an important parameter, to assess the individuality as a defensive mechanism to protect themselves.

Education.

Inadequate access to education has excluded them from jobs requiring different skills and qualifications. Such inequality in education due to inaccess has continued despite commitments by various governments. All of this led women turn into a passive observer in the society of the country (EndalcachewBayeh, 2016., Ndirika & Agommuoh., 2017). Number of studies have proven the importance of female education and emphasised the need of it for greater empowerment and improved socio-economic status (Adetunde & Akampae., 2008).

Avoid subjugation

Individuality depends upon three interrelated elements eg. achievements and resources. The resources relate to social and human along with associated allocations. Achievements is a sense of ability to define one's goals, decide on strategic life outcomes and act upon them. This leads to variety of outcomes like improved well-being, with an underlying assumption that women's empowerment attains certain achievements by using resources in an agentic manner (Marloes et al., 2017).

Health & Hygiene

Women undergo lot of traumas due to poor hygienic conditions often, due to lack of knowledge and concern related to opposite gender requirements (Bekele, 1980). It is observed that in the context of health and hygiene related problems, the women have less power in relationships, that further compounded their problems making them vulnerable in economic, political and socio-cultural status (Sanghita Bhattacharyya & Aradhana Srivastava, 2016). Such degradation of status and may not be in a position to protect themselves from gender-based violence, and unwanted sexual intercourse (Afework et al., 2019).

Organizational factors

Women face barriers to progression within organization, due to barriers which are not faced by their male counterparts. In many countries, while women are gaining managerial experience, they still encounter a glass ceiling. Research results confirm that career blockages for women appear at much earlier stages than for men, and that as women move up the managerial hierarchy, they repeatedly encounter the glass ceiling (Carol Isaac et al., 2009). The culture of the organisation reflects transformational initiatives of the organisation, its vital role in placement of Women supportive policies, ensuring women empowerment as inherent in the organisation. Important parameters an organisation should keep in place are **Safe working environment** and a good **Training and Mentoring** for the women progression. There are laws to ensure **Safe working environment** at work places and is one of the regulatory compliances. An imperative need is to take proactive steps in this direction, to ensure safe working conditions and healthy environment for women, protecting them from sexual harassment or misconduct (Sevkat & Hedvig ., 2019). **Training and Mentoring** is an another important parameter, ensures the women gain acceptance, respect and self-confidence (Anderson, 2005). Women oriented training ensures their career progression and facing future challenges (Madsen, 2012).

Social factors

The skewed perceptions, prevalent in society due to epistemological prejudices restricted women involvement with unequal participation, limiting overall social transformation and development. Social transformation is a key pillar to achieve progress of women. Prevalence of such gender related issues and non - involvement of women in societal activities impedes her development and empowerment. Social factors which influence and involve are categorised as Openness for Mobility & Visibility, where women have social independence, female gender are allowed to participate in societal activities without prejudice. Financial independence is another factor and a key component of women empowerment, to avoid the dependence of them on male counterparts. Inheritance rights for the property, to have a say in family matters, and early or child marriage without she attaining the marriageable age. These factors limit the progress of the women (EndalcachewBayeh, 2016). One of the first steps towards women empowerment is ensuring that they have enough financial stability. In most cases, women in abusive and toxic relationships feel stuck and helpless because they do not have financial independence.

Figure 2

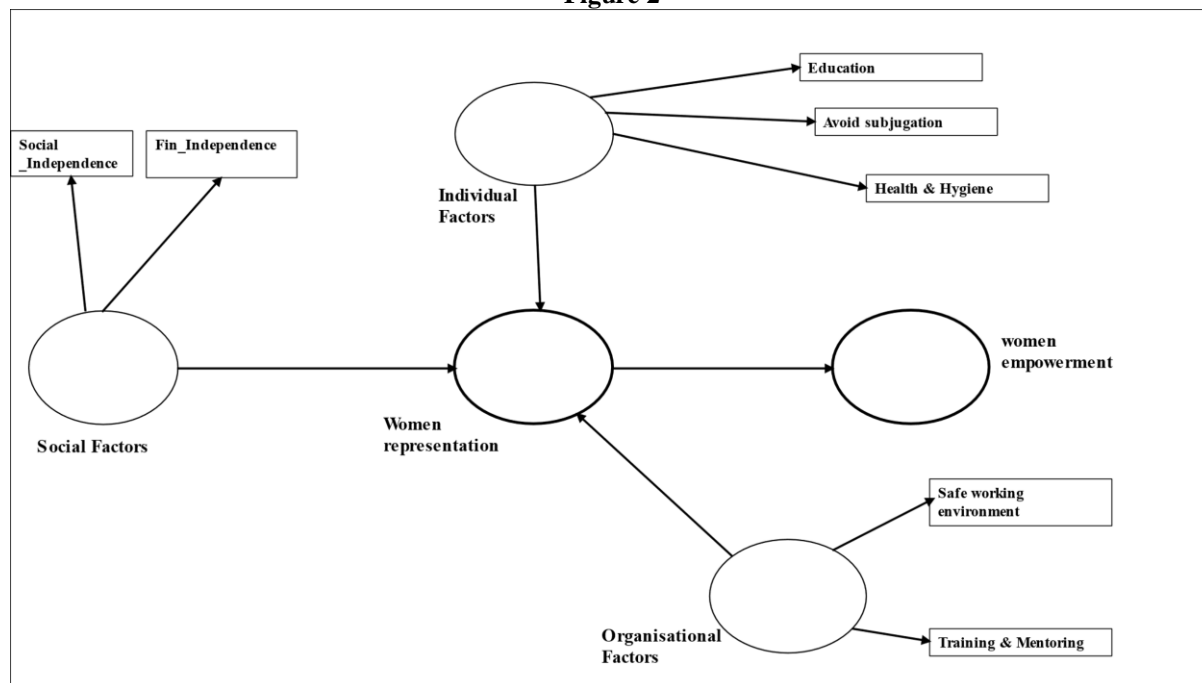


Figure 2 : Constructs showing relationship

The research questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ 1. Is there any significant difference in perceptions that constrain women in taking up career due to epistemological reasons in society?

RQ 2. Is there any significant development in perceptions of factors that constrain women in career up taking due to gender differences in the workplace?

RQ 3. Is there significant effect by government programmes, in interaction effects in perceptions of factors about women’s career advancement?

III. Research Methodology

Quantitative study has been used and collected primary data for the analysis of research objective set out in the study. Structured questionnaire was prepared and forwarded to respondents through Random Probability Sampling method to obtain the unbiased responses from the sample and to obtain realistic views. Questionnaire has been prepared based on factors identified. A sample size of 170 responses received and the data has been collated, cleaned and analysed. A cumulative empowerment factor is created as dependable variable to know the **women representation** as an index to gauge the empowerment in the organisation. JASP (Jeffreys’s Amazing Statistics Program) software has been used for statistical analysis. This software is **supported** by the University of Amsterdam and is an **open source free to use program for statistical analysis**.

Statistical Analysis and Findings

Multiple regression has been used to predict the women empowerment based on the relationship between dependent variable ie Women representation and factors identified for which responses have been received, to identify all of the relationships between variables. The correlation coefficient ie Multiple R is 0.89 gives positive relationship. Coefficient of Determination ie R Square value of 0.84 declares the “value as fit model”.

Table 2: Goodness of Fit

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.896663
R Square	0.804005
Adjusted R Square	0.795536
Standard Error	0.229886
Observations	170

Overall significance of the regression and predictions

Table 3 : Regression Output

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	0.023055	0.175877	0.131087	0.89586908
Openess	0.162827	0.018017	9.03753	0.00000000
Fin indep	0.153331	0.01803	8.504055	0.00000000
Safe work envnt	0.132043	0.022086	5.978627	0.00000001
Trg & Mentor	0.136847	0.014759	9.272019	0.00000000
Education	0.10538	0.017411	6.052492	0.00000001
Avoid subjugation	0.147892	0.016142	9.162175	0.00000000
Health& Hyg	0.138908	0.017823	7.793688	0.00000000

The values of coefficient for each independent variable is in positive direction, and the size of the effect of change or variation occurs is ranging from 10% to 16%. The ‘P’ value for all independent variables is less than 0.05 and signifies rejecting Null Hypothesis and declares as no correlation between dependent variable and independent variable. Thus, the result confirms that the Three dimension frame work created is indeed, a good model and the sample results confirms as that of the population. The women strength available in organisation confirms the factors selected does influence the women empowerment in the organisations and impact the career advancement of women

Learnings

Studies shows that work-life position and the associated benefits are generally to help women employees to balance the work and non-work commitments. As work-life benefits are policies designed to help employees manage the competing demands of life, work, and family, women centric or women-oriented policies give comfort and will help in women career advancement (Yet M. Lim et al., 2013). Conceptualising the women career and experiencing their success affects positively at the general outlook in life. Individual factors contribute in generating drive, motivation and strategize individual career to a leading success. The other support factors such as Organisational and Social factors influence framing of women-oriented policies and certain legislative mandates aimed at redress the grievances of the women, further paves way for the development of individual career, thus contributing for the positive development of society (Chinyamurindi, 2016).

IV. Conclusion

Women face barriers within the organization for career progression and such barriers are non-existent for their male counterparts. The Work- life balance is essential when stress from work and performing the family role becomes mutually incompatible, making participation in both the roles, with vigour and sincerity as difficult. Balancing the career and family becomes significant barrier, yet as social norm, women are expected to perform both roles (Izmayani et al., 2016). Studies done have concluded that women managers are less likely to be promoted, in comparison to the male counterparts. There is also gender categorised roles for initial hiring and also during upward move in career, thus limiting the opportunities for the women. Such biases existed due to prejudice (Karen & Judiesch ., 1999). However series of Constitutional protective measures, various government policies are formulated and implemented in India to make way for the empowerment of women. Many women studies have become important and integral branch of mainstream in India. However, situation has improved as many innovative approaches were adopted to ensure empowerment of women, with equal opportunities in all respects. The barriers started falling and women started breaking the glass ceilings.

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Thogaram Umasankar, et. al. “Barriers to Women Empowerment in the Context of Epistemological Diversity.” *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*, 24(03), 2022, pp. 43-50.