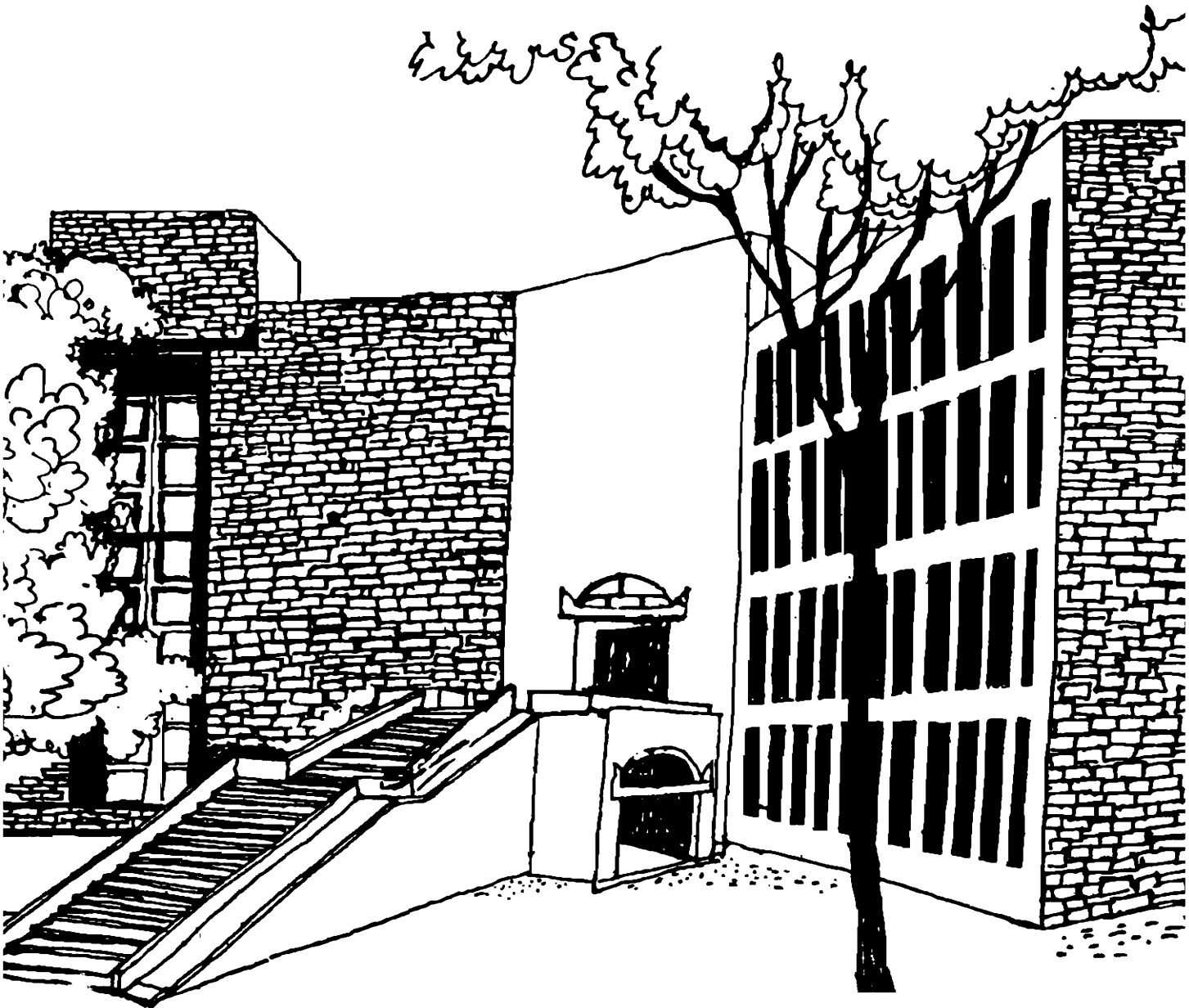




Working Paper



AN ENQUIRY INTO THE VARIOUS FACETS OF
WOMEN'S CAREERS

By

Jaya Kapoor
Gopa Bhardwaj
&
D.M. Pestonjee

W.P.No.99-08-02 /1536
August 1999

WP1536

WP
99-08-02
(1536)

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Jaya Kapoor

Prof. Gopa Bhardwaj

And

Dr. D.M. Pestonjee

*Professor in Organizational Behaviour Area,
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad*

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ABSTRACT

Women's careers are subject to personal, interpersonal and societal influences of various kinds. From an empiricist point of view, the study was done to get an insight into the various facets of women's careers. The sample of the study consisted of 30 women executives and 30 women non-executives from a public sector organisation; and 30 women executives and 30 women non-executives from a private sector organisation. The data were collected through qualitative research techniques. Results indicated that except for women executives of the private sector organisation, the other three groups derived primary satisfaction from family relationships with, career integrated with rest of their lives in a secondary way. Women executives of the private sector organisation derived primary satisfaction from their career or occupation. As regards to their levels of ambition, women employees aspired to hold a high position. The results showed that women employees resembled one another closely on 'intrinsic' value of having a reputation for extreme competence in their chosen fields. Women employees felt that their social circles tended to favour that women ought to be able to work a bit, but not so as to allow it to interfere with home and family obligations. Family was perceived as a barrier to a married woman's career commitment. Particularly most of the women employees agreed that husband's career plans interfere with a married woman's career commitment.

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INTRODUCTION

The decade of nineteen ninety is coming to an end and it is the proper time to examine women's career patterns. This is the era when the various psychological barriers regarding women's work have been reduced to a great extent and women are entering those spheres that were till now male dominated. This century has witnessed Indian women enter new spheres of action. From being daughters, wives and mothers they entered educational and health institutions. They became teachers and nurses. Came the freedom movement and women in large numbers joined the freedom struggle. Came the time for building nation - women joined the educational institutions and entered the fields of medicine, law, science, industry and finally made inroads into the field of management in formal work and industrial organisations (Parikh, 1990).

In the present era the career is viewed as a series of life-long work related experiences and personal learnings (Hall, 1976). Women's careers have started receiving recognition and importance nowadays because of this changing concept of career, with subjective aspect being emphasised. It focuses on the changing aspirations, satisfactions, self-conceptions and other attitudes of the person towards his or her work and life. Research on the career development of women is relatively new. Research on aspects of women's careers have focused on the conflict women experience between home and work roles (Beutell and Greenhaus, 1983; Greenglass, 1985); or on dual-career issues (Sekaran, 1984; Okocha and Perrone, 1992; Izraeli, 1993). Another set of research related to women's careers have focused on discrimination. Discrimination based on

gender relates to wages, task-allocation, responsibility, status, position and/or promotion (Parikh, 1990). Considerable research work has also been done in the area of their choice of traditional versus non-traditional career field and career aspirations (Eccles, 1987; Shukla and Chauhan, 1987; Nevill and Schlecker, 1988; Read, 1994).

A multidimensional perspective is necessary to study a woman's career pattern. There are many forces that interplay. The demands of the marital role must be balanced against the demands of occupational role. There are also other influences which can operate to determine the way the reorganisation process is resolved, or even whether or not the entry to the new status is attempted. Career aspirations - generally recognised as different for men and women in our society - are not simple and fixed (and therefore 'natural') but complex and variable, subject to personal, interpersonal and societal influences of various kinds.

People themselves vary in the importance they attach to different areas of their lives and the degree to which they obtain or expect to obtain personal satisfaction from family life, from work or career, and from other areas of life such as leisure activities, participation in community affairs, and so on. They are not likely to show outstanding achievements in the activity that has low salience.

Levels of aspirations and types of aspirations are the components of work careers. Women are generally thought to have a low level of aspiration than men, but levels of aspiration of men and women are much more nearly alike when they are younger than subsequently. For men with transition into marriage and fatherhood, the level of career aspiration tends to rise. Whereas the level of aspiration of married women particularly those with children, falls more sharply than that of the single women (Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport, 1971).

However, women do not alter their 'intrinsic' aspirations - i.e., the specific kinds of interests and values which they seek in work *per se*. They wish as much as the men, as persistently as the men to have the kind of career in which they can do an interesting job. Females seldom select an occupation for its extrinsic material rewards or for 'desire class standing'. These are sought through their husbands occupation (Turner, 1964).

Career commitment of an individual is largely influenced by the societal contexts. A prevalent view in our society is that highly qualified women should do some kind of work but, that this should not interfere with their traditionally defined domestic duties. To this, some add that it should not interfere with the husband and his career requirements. Husbands as well as their wives vary in the degree to which they are committed to women's careers, and the husband's attitude is important to the women - though not absolutely decisive.

Although there is a great deal of research conducted on aspects of women's careers, few studies have been done in the Indian context. Therefore, the need for the present study was felt and the study was done to enquire into the various facets of women's careers.

METHOD

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of women employees from two organisations: a public sector organisation and a private sector organisation. Data were collected from 30 women executives and 30 women non-executives of a public sector organisation (Groups 1 and 2); and from 30 women executives and 30 women non-executives of a private sector organisation (Groups 3 and 4). Thus in the present study the total sample consisted of 120 subjects divided into four groups.

Measures

In the present study simple method of ranking was adopted. After reviewing the literature certain variables were identified and those variables were assessed.

The five variables assessed were:

1. Areas of life giving greatest satisfaction
2. Levels of ambition
3. Types of ambition
4. Attitude of social circle towards women's employment
5. Married woman's career commitment.

There were five items or statements related to each of these variables. Subjects were asked to rank their preferences from 1 to 5 (highest to lowest), on the statements under each of these variables with appropriate instructions. Subjects were also interviewed.

Procedure

Prior permission of collecting the data was taken from the two organisations. Respondents were assured of confidentiality of their responses. They were approached individually to get their rankings and were requested to follow the instructions. Respondents were also interviewed. Each respondent was thanked for her participation in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Average ranks were calculated, results and discussion are as follows.

Insert table 1 about here

Table-1 indicates the preference order for the variable of *areas of life giving greatest satisfaction*, in each of the four groups. Results show that except for women executives of the private sector organisation, the other three groups of women employees derive primary satisfaction from family relationships, with career integrated with rest of their lives in a secondary manner. Whereas women executives of the private sector organisation derive primary satisfaction from their career or occupation, it was ranked the highest followed by family relationships. The private sector organisations are characterised by competitive environment and it provides greater opportunities for career development at higher levels. This may be the reason why professionally qualified women executives are able to experience greatest satisfaction in the area of career or occupation in such organisations. All of the women executives of the private sector organisation agreed that their organisation takes care of career development of its women employees. It can be observed from the obtained

results that family relationships for women are still important and this is an expression of the cultural normative view for women in our society. Though women executives of private sector organisation ranked career or occupation as the top most, family relationships was ranked second and not far behind, so they are also not very deviant in this respect. Participation as a citizen in the affairs of the community ranked the lowest in all the groups. This seems obvious because working women have to look after their families also. They probably do not get time to participate in community affairs. Most of the women employees reported that they do not get time to participate in social activities.

Insert table 2 about here

Table-2 shows average ranks of each of the four groups on the variable of *levels of ambition*. The analyses of the obtained results reveal that all the groups of women employees reported having higher levels of ambition. None of the groups ranked the statement 'didn't think about this aspect' as the topmost. The ambitions 'to hold a high position' and 'to get to the top' were given higher ranks in all the groups. This may mean that women do have high levels of ambition in contrast to the generally prevalent view that women have low aspirations. Much clearer picture could have been obtained, had we compared the groups on the basis of age and marital status.

Insert table 3 about here

Table-3 indicates the preference order for the variable of *types of ambition*, in each of the four groups. The obtained results show that overall women employees resemble one another much more closely on the 'intrinsic' value of having a reputation for extreme competence in their chosen fields, it was ranked the highest. The type of ambition, to 'be powerful' ranked the lowest in all the groups. The possible reasons for this could be that women generally want to

utilise their skills and they seldom enter the field of employment for extrinsic rewards such as money or power. Mostly women employees of the present study reported following plans they have for enhancement of their careers in the organisation: (a) updating knowledge by reading books and journals, (b) taking up the assigned task seriously, (c) working hard honestly, (d) showing core competence in one's field, (e) look for opportunities, (f) be work conscious and (g) attend more and more training programs to update skills.

Insert table 4 about here

Another variable examined as a proximate influence is the *attitude of social circle toward women's employment*. Table-4 indicates the preference order on this variable in each of the four groups. Results reveal, women employees felt that their social circles tend to favour that women ought to be able work a bit, but not so as to allow it to interfere with home and family obligations. The statement 'women ought not to work outside the home' ranked the lowest in all the groups. This is indicative of a change in the thinking of Indian society, earlier very conservative attitude was prevalent. Now social circle is perceived as favouring women's employment, but still to the extent that it does not interfere with family life. Women employees reported that society has started accepting career oriented women and this enhances their social status.

Insert table 5 about here

Table-5 shows the average ranks of each of the four groups on the variable of *married woman's career commitment*. Most of the women employees agreed that a married woman cannot make long-range plans for her career because they depend on her husband's career plans for this. It was ranked the highest in three

of the groups, except in case of women executives of the public sector organisation (Group 1). Women executives of the public sector organisation strongly agreed to the statement 'a married woman's career cannot be growth oriented as she has too many responsibilities at home', as it was ranked the highest in their group. Women employees of both the organisations strongly disagreed to the statement 'a married woman's career should not be encouraged as she takes away the job opportunities from man - the breadwinner', it was ranked the lowest in all the groups. The results indicate that family is perceived as a barrier to a married woman's career commitment, particularly most of the women employees agreed that husband's career plans interfere with a married woman's career commitment. Most of the married women employees felt that their husbands contribute to some extent in household duties. However, most of the married women employees of the present study felt that if they are in a superior position than that of their husbands, their marital relationships will be affected. Women employees generally agreed that a woman has to play multiple roles in her life making it difficult to concentrate on her career. Married women employees reported that they have to face difficulties in maintaining a balance between work and family and their career suffers because of family responsibilities. Thus it can be said that a reconciliation between the occupational and familial roles, affect a married woman's career commitment.

Although much has changed in the working*world, and women are moving towards greater career orientations, women still face many difficulties in their career growth and advancement. They still bear the primary responsibility of family life. Women can help their own case by recognising and exploring their superior abilities in interpersonal relationships. Organisations can help women by providing better mentoring, guidance and training opportunities and by increasing their sensitivity to work-home conflicts. A collective organised action is thus needed to help women pursue their career paths.

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Table - 1: Showing Average Ranks Of Each Of The Four Groups On The Variable Of "Areas Of Life Giving Greatest Satisfaction"

STATEMENTS	Average Ranks*			
	Group 1 (n = 30)	Group 2 (n = 30)	Group 3 (n = 30)	Group 4 (n = 30)
1. Your career or occupation	2.07	2.57	1.70	2.53
2. Family relationships	1.47	1.90	2.57	1.63
3. Leisure time recreational activities	3.77	3.73	3.10	3.13
4. Running a home	3.03	2.43	3.40	2.87
5. Participation as a citizen in the affairs of your community	4.67	4.37	4.23	4.83

* On a 5 point scale (1 - highest rank; 5 - lowest rank)

Table - 2: Showing Average Ranks Of Each Of The Four Groups On The Variable Of "Levels Of Ambition"

STATEMENTS	Average Ranks*			
	Group 1 (n = 30)	Group 2 (n = 30)	Group 3 (n = 30)	Group 4 (n = 30)
1. To get to the top	2.03	2.43	1.60	2.37
2. To hold a high position	1.27	1.77	1.67	1.83
3. To get along, just make a living	3.70	2.97	3.67	3.43
4. To remain stable at middle level	3.47	2.83	3.07	2.50
5. Didn't think about this aspect	4.53	5.00	5.00	4.87

* On a 5 point scale (1 - highest rank; 5 - lowest rank)

Table - 3: Showing Average Ranks Of Each Of The Four Groups On The Variable Of "Types of Ambition"

STATEMENTS	Average Ranks*			
	Group 1 (n = 30)	Group 2 (n = 30)	Group 3 (n = 30)	Group 4 (n = 30)
1. Have a reputation for extreme competence in one's field	1.87	2.03	1.23	1.90
2. Be famous	2.40	3.43	2.90	3.37
3. Be creative	2.73	2.37	2.60	2.07
4. Be rich	3.50	3.10	3.77	3.27
5. Be powerful	4.50	4.07	4.50	4.40

* On a 5 point scale (1 - highest rank; 5 - lowest rank)

Table - 4: Showing Average Ranks Of Each Of The Four Groups On The Variable Of "Attitude Of Social Circle Towards Women's Employment"

STATEMENTS	Average Ranks*			
	Group 1 (n = 30)	Group 2 (n = 30)	Group 3 (n = 30)	Group 4 (n = 30)
1. Most people feel that women ought to have the same opportunity to pursue an important career as men	2.00	2.57	2.50	1.87
2. Most people feel that women ought to be able to work a bit, but not so as to allow it to interfere with home and family obligations	1.63	2.27	1.33	1.60
3. Women ought not to work outside the home	4.17	3.90	4.70	4.17
4. The working women's existence interferes with social fabric of community	3.40	2.90	3.70	3.27
5. Most people feel that status of man as breadwinner and status of woman as homemaker only, should be retained	3.80	3.37	2.77	4.10

* On a 5 point scale (1 - highest rank; 5 - lowest rank)

Table - 5: Showing Average Ranks Of Each Of The Four Groups On The Variable Of "Married Woman's Career Commitment"

STATEMENTS	Average Ranks*			
	Group 1 (n = 30)	Group 2 (n = 30)	Group 3 (n = 30)	Group 4 (n = 30)
1. A married woman cannot make long-range plans for her career because they depend on her husband's plans for this	1.93	1.83	1.13	1.50
2. A married woman's career cannot be growth oriented as she has too many responsibilities at home	1.57	2.17	2.37	2.33
3. A married woman's career will be ineffective as her family interferes with her working life	2.70	3.03	2.77	2.40
4. A married woman's career is obstacle to organisational development plans as she is bound by restrictions and cannot be free as man	3.90	3.90	3.80	4.00
5. A married woman's career should not be encouraged as she takes away the job opportunities from man-the breadwinner	4.90	4.07	4.93	4.77

* On a 5 point scale (1 - highest rank; 5 - lowest rank)

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