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which you can use to change the world.
- Nelson Mandela

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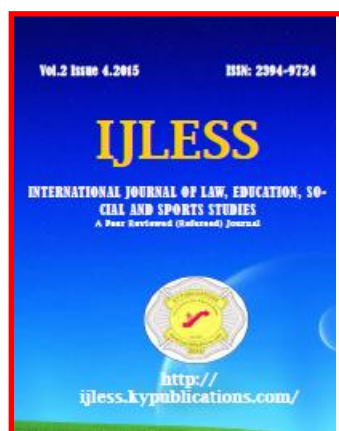
CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN URBAN INDIA

VRINDA VINAYAK

IIND YEAR, B.A. LL.B. (HONS.), NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY DELHI

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Review Article



ABSTRACT

According to a study conducted by Catalyst, women constitute only 13.8% of the urban workforce in India, and the 64th round of the National Sample Survey reveals that the work participation rate of women in urban areas is substantially lesser than that of men. These skewed ratios may be explained by looking at the various challenges working women face on a personal, as well as professional (workplace) level. This paper aims to paint a holistic picture of these challenges through interviews conducted among one hundred and twenty women belonging to different strata of society. The empirical study has been conducted through a survey (attached as Appendix), the results of which have been presented in the form of pie-charts. Doctrinal research has been used to analyse the causes of these challenges, and theories behind them, and the research method for this paper is descriptive.

The objectives this paper seeks to achieve are:

- To provide an account of the status of women in modern India.
- To study the challenges faced by working women in urban India on a personal, as well as professional level.
- To provide suggestions and recommendations for employers, to retain female employees.

INTRODUCTION- STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

India has long been a patriarchal society, where a woman's primary duty is considered first, to be an ideal daughter to her father and then, a caring and submissive wife to her husband. While some texts of ancient India conferred an 'equal' status on women and referred to a wife as 'ardhangini' (i.e. the better half), other texts held them in disrespect, and even positive hatred. Even if she enjoyed the theoretical 'equal' status conferred on her by sacred texts, it seldom translated into similar practical application. The situation worsened in the post-Rigvedic period, when the girl child came to be regarded as a curse, and was stripped of inheritance and property rights. With practices like sati, pardah, polygamy and prevention of widow remarriage in the 11th-18th century, the status of women steadily deteriorated. In the period of British rule, legislations such as the Abolition of Sati Act 1813, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856, Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 and Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act 1939, along with efforts by social reformers to educate the girl child, led to improvement in the status of women.

Aparadox that plagues Indian society is that on one hand, women are worshipped in the form of goddesses such as Saraswati and Lakshmi who are symbols of strength, autonomy and respect, and on the other hand, women are considered to hold second place to men, expected to submit to the authority of the 'superior' male species, and are allotted roles in accordance with their 'inferior' status. Female foeticide and infanticide remain common practices. It is

often believed that a woman remains a dependent, a liability, all her life; before marriage, she is protected by her father, then provided for by her husband, and looked after in her old age by her children. Indian society does not accord agency or autonomy of any sort on women, who are seen as incapable of providing for themselves.¹The restrictive role society has reserved for them happens to be within the confines of the household, as a homemaker and a mother. Now, self-realization and questioning of societal norms and 'standards of behaviour' by women themselves, coupled with legislative and judicial activism has forced society to view women differently. The 2011 Census of India boasts of a 48.5% female population², 53.70% female literacy rate³, and 44.40% females in higher-education.⁴Managing to break free from the shackles of gender stereotypes, they now work outside their homes, as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, managers, and even head institutions; jobs that were traditionally viewed as being beyond their capability.⁵

This expanding female workforce faces too faces its share of serious challenges, sometimes stemming from societal expectations, and at others from their families, employers or working environment. Economic growth in low-middle-income countries usually creates more jobs for women; but as India's economy grew at an average of 7 percent from 2007-2011, its female labour force participation fell from 31 percent to 24 percent.⁶ Girls' education levels are increasing, but without a commensurate increase in their workforce participation; the positive labour market for women seems to be on a steep decline. The International Labour Organisation, in its 2013 Global Employment Trends Report, ranked India 11th from the bottom in female labour force participation.⁷ For women, working confers them with financial security, a control over assets and a greater say in household matters. Domestic violence in households where women work outside of the house is also found to be lower.⁸ Furthermore, an economy where all members of the population are given equal opportunities to work grows faster.

Women are still often confined to the house to retain their 'purity', by protecting them from men other than their fathers or husbands. These gender roles are also responsible for the opposition some women face when they work. Motherhood influences women's jobs too; their jobs are either terminated, or they quit of their own volition, owing sometimes to guilt, and at other times to opposition. Fear, anxiety, depression at not being able to achieve a balance between work and family, workplace issues such as discrimination, harassment, lack of flexibility etc. are also common problems among working women in urban India today.

CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN URBAN INDIA

The 120 women interviewed for this study span 4 income groups (in Rs. per annum), viz, below 1,00,000, 1,00,000- 5,00,000, 5,00,000- 10,00,000 and above 10,00,000. Thirty women were surveyed from each category i.e. each income group forms 25% of the sample size. The group 'below 1,00,000 p.a.' has been classified as the lower income group, '1,00,000- 10,00,000 p.a.' has been clubbed as the middle income group, while 'above 10,00,000 p.a.' is the higher income group. 52.5% of the surveyed audience works in the private sector, 13.3% in the public sector or a government organisation, and 20% in the unorganised sector. 14.6% of the women surveyed are self-employed. These income and work-sector groups are essential to understand women's motivation to work, and the challenges they face at their workplaces.

Family circumstances, such as the marital status of women, and whether or not they have children is an important factor influencing their work, and consequent challenges such as opposition to their work, guilt, fear anxiety and depression. 77.5% of the women surveyed are married, and 70.8% reported having children. 65.9% of the women surveyed said they have a support system in the nature of either a joint family, day-care facilities, or domestic help at home to care for their children while they are away at work.

¹NIVEDITA MENON, *SEEING LIKE A FEMINIST* (2012).

²Officer of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, *Census of India Report 2001-2011* (2012).

³*Id.*

⁴Department of Higher Education, *All India Survey on Higher Education 2011-12* 1 (2013).

⁵LEELA DUBE, *ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS IN GENDER: INTERSECTING FIELDS* (2001).

⁶Rohini Pande & Charity Troyer Moore, *Why Aren't India's Women Working*, *THE NEW YORK TIMES* (Aug 23, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/24/opinion/why-arent-indias-women-working.html?_r=1 (Last visited on Sep 03, 2015).

⁷*Global Employment Trends Report*, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (2013), <http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2013/lang-en/index.htm> (Last visited on Sep 03, 2015).

⁸PANDE, *supra* note 6.

Figure 1: Marital Status

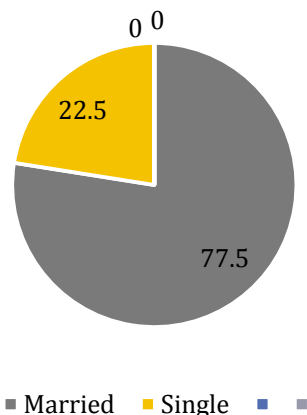
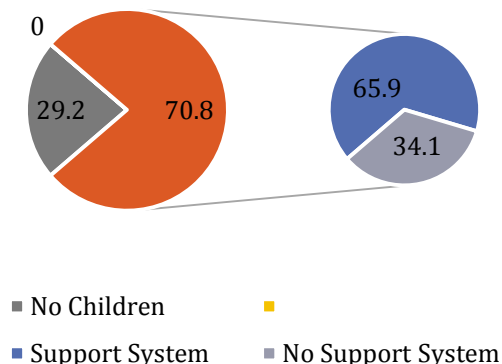


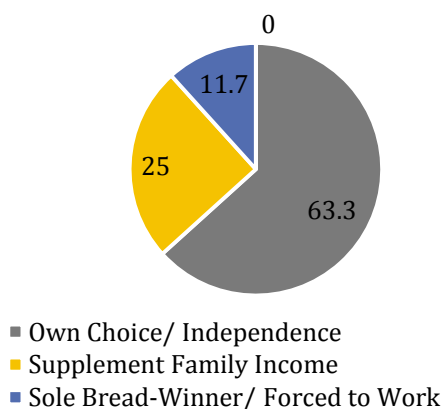
Figure 2: Status of Children



I. WHY DO WOMEN WORK?

While a lot of women are found to work to supplement their family income, but it is not necessarily the driving force behind all women's decision to work, especially those belonging to the higher income group. In countries like the USA, women with the most financial resources are the ones most likely to stay employed.⁹ In India too, we find a similar trend; women work not only for their own and their families' financial security, but for a plethora of other reasons such as the sense of accomplishment when it allowed them to balance work and family, or earned recognition and appreciation, possibility for advancement, possibility of improving their families' social status etc. 63.3% women reported working out of their own choice, and to feel financially secure and independent, 25% work to supplement their family income, while the remaining 11.7% are either the sole bread-winners for their families, or have been forced to work.

Figure 3: Motivation for Working



The research conducted shows that while most women in the higher income group and middle income group work out of choice (83.3% and 68.3% respectively), a majority of women in the lower income group work either to supplement their family income (43.3%), or are the sole-bread winners/ have been forced to work (23.3%).

When questioned about whether they would like to continue working if given a choice, 85% of women responded enthusiastically in the affirmative. Surprisingly, 35% of women from the lower income group who are either working to supplement their family income or have been forced to work expressed a willingness to continue working. "My husband works as a guard and doesn't have a stable income, which is why I have to work. But now, despite all the challenges, I would like to continue working. It gives me a sense of accomplishment," said a housekeeper belonging to

⁹S. Damaskke, *The Real Reason Women Work*, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY (May 03, 2012), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-family/201205/the-real-reason-women-work> (Last visited on Sep 01, 2015).

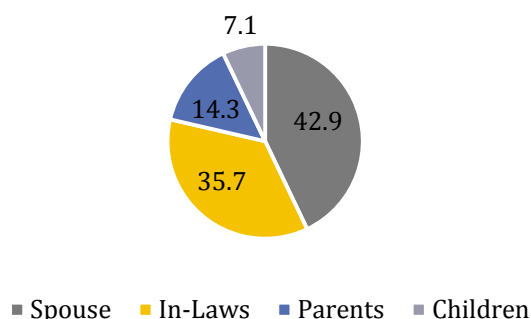
the lower income group. 94.4% of women in the middle income group working due to similar circumstances also wanted to continue working.

II. PERSONAL CHALLENGES

(i) Family Opposition:

Personal challenges to working women arise primarily from society's conception of the institution of 'family'. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, Indian families foster a certain conception of gender roles that women are supposed to abide by. Stepping out of the household and leaving their families to work outside the house certainly attracts critique. 23.3% women reported having faced opposition to their work from their families; 42.9% from their spouse, 35.7% from their in-laws, 14.3% from their parents and 7.1% from their children. The research shows that 22.6% married women face opposition from their families regarding their work, while 14.8% single women deal with such opposition.

Figure 4: Whom Do Women Face Opposition to their Work from?



(ii) Motherhood:

Often, motherhood adversely affects women's working prospects too. 22.6% of women who have children face family pressure to quit their jobs, while 11.4% of those who do not have children face such pressure too. These figures are representative of how women in India have to bear the brunt of strictly-defined gender roles, where society believes their rightful position to be exclusively inside the household, caring for the family and raising the children. Since mothering is done overwhelmingly by women, it socializes women and men to have different identities, personalities and skills. Juliet Mitchell argues that women's different relations to productive work, reproduction, socialization of children and sexuality in patriarchy give her lesser economic and psychological power in relation to men.¹⁰

On the other hand, employers assume that on becoming pregnant, female employees will de-prioritize their work.¹¹ They are often unwilling to make allowances for mothers, and at times, their employment is even terminated.¹² MP and leading businesswoman Anu Aga says, "There is a tendency to give greater importance to a man's job than a woman's job in India. So, companies are not willing to make special allowances to integrate women after they take a break for becoming mothers."¹³ Organisations often do offer maternity leaves, but when 34.1% of women do not have a support system at home for their children, this short-term leave is seldom enough.

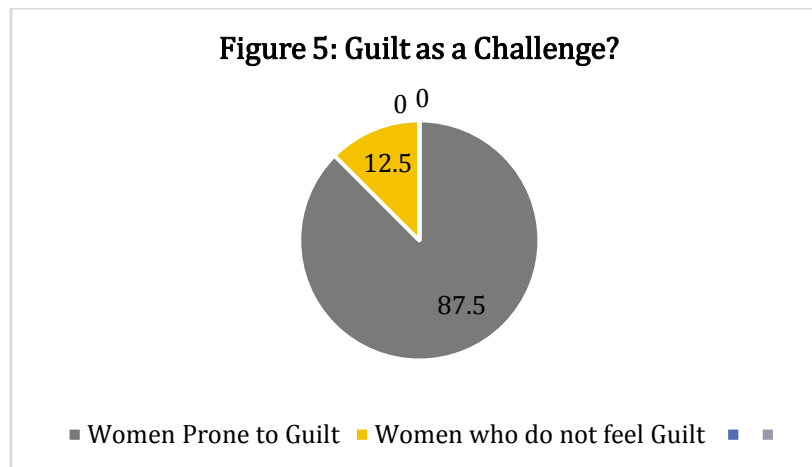
¹⁰JULIET MITCHELL, *WOMEN'S ESTATE* (1972).

¹¹S. Smith, *Family and Work: How the Balancing Act Disadvantages Women in the Workplace*, SOCIOLOGISTS FOR WOMEN IN SOCIETY (Sep 15, 2002), http://www.socwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/fact_09-2002-family-and-work.pdf (Last visited on Sep 03, 2015).

¹²R. Karmakar, *Pregnant Shillong Doctor Fired for Seeking Maternity Leave*, HINDUSTAN TIMES (Aug 11, 2015), <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pregnant-shillong-doctor-fired-for-seeking-maternity-leave/article1-1378771.aspx> (Last visited on Sep 03, 2015).

¹³D. Arya, *Why Motherhood Makes Indian Women Quit their Jobs*, BBC NEWS (Apr 23, 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-32377275> (Last visited on Sep 03, 2015).

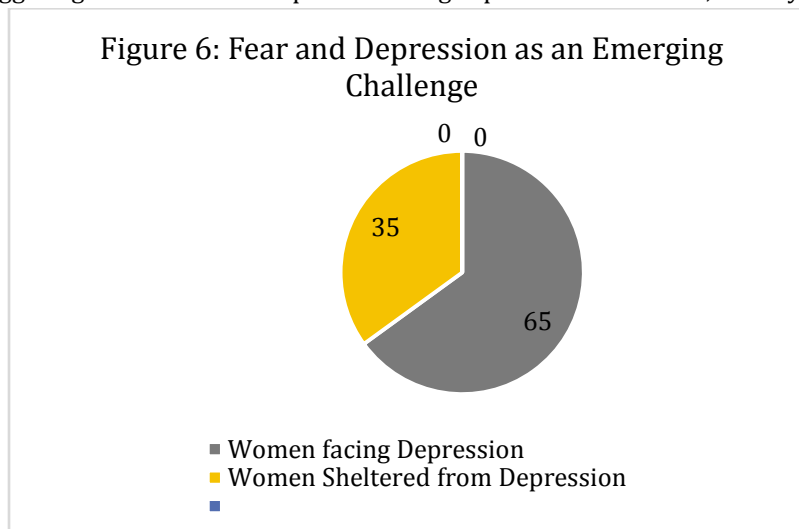
(iii) *Guilt:*



Anu Aga is of the opinion that even women who have family support or can afford to pay for day-care sometimes quit their jobs, because of guilt. She believes that this guilt is a result of societal expectations that it their job to bring up children. The research survey that women are prone to feelings of serious guilt over either not being able to maintain a balance between their work and family lives, or at having to leave their children at home. 60% of women answered in the negative when asked if they are able to juggle and constantly balance their family and their work, and 87.5% of these women feel guilty about such lack of balance. 71.8% of women (who have children) felt guilty about having to leave their children at home, and a majority of these (62.3%) feel this guilt despite having a support system for their children at home.

(iv) *Fear, Anxiety, Depression:*

An emerging challenge among working women in modern India are the psycho-social issues of fear, anxiety and depression, arising from a constant conflict between personal and professional lives, and from workplace pressures and expectations. A staggering 65% of women reported having experienced such fear, anxiety or depression.



Women and depression has been attracting the interest of scholars over the last two decades.¹⁴One theory proposes that women feel a lack of control over negative events, by virtue of their societal roles.¹⁵ Feminists believe that women are more prone to depression than men, because their social roles do not make them feel petent enough.¹⁶It has also been speculated that sexual stereotyping of women as helpless and dependent, makes them more prone to fear and

¹⁴Anita Sharma & Chander Prabha & Dalip Malhotra, *Perceived Sex Role and Fear of Success in Depression of Working*, 35 WOMEN JOURNAL OF THE INDIAN ACADEMY OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY 251, 251-256 (2009).

¹⁵L. RADLOFF, SEX DIFFERENCES IN DEPRESSION: THE EFFECTS OF OCCUPATION AND MARITAL STATUS 249 (1975).

¹⁶SHARMA, *supra* note 14.

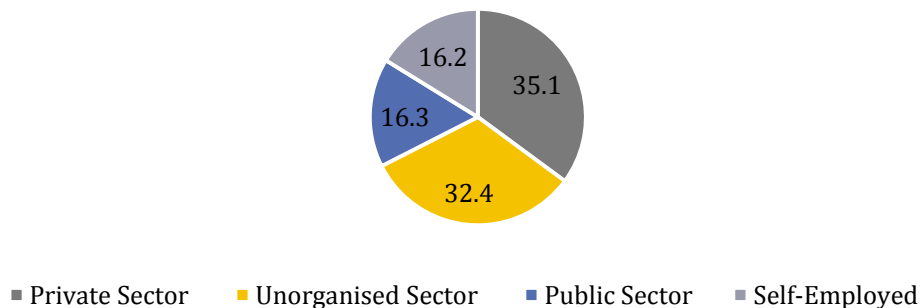
anxiety.¹⁷ As more women are entering the work force, they are being exposed to unique pressures created by multiple roles and conflicting expectations.¹⁸

III. CHALLENGES AT THE WORKPLACE

(i) Discrimination:

The sociological institution of 'economy' is often found to treat men and women differently. The most common challenge women in urban India face at their workplace is discrimination based on their gender. It can come in the form of withholding promotions, giving a different job title to a woman, preventing women from participating in training opportunities or sexual harassment. The results discrimination against females in the workplace can include diminished company revenue, high employee turnover, low morale and reduced productivity. 30.8% women feel that they have faced such discrimination. Women being passed over for promotion and being discriminated against is an application of the Glass Ceiling Theory given by David Cotter. The glass ceiling is "the unseen, yet unbreakable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements."¹⁹

Figure 7: Sector-Wise Discrimination Profile



21% of the sample size answered in the affirmative when asked if their workplace makes them feel inferior to their male counterpart, while 29.9% women reported being paid less than men in the same position of work. 19.2% feel that their employers do not accepted, or even respect, their suggestions and opinions, and 27.5% feel that promotional avenues and advancement opportunities are more for men than for female employees.

(ii) Sexual Harassment:

In the famous *Vishaka* judgement, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India observed that "Gender equality includes protection from sexual harassment and right to work with dignity, which is a universally recognized basic human right."²⁰ The Justice Varma Committee in its 2013 Report also opined that "the time has come when women must be able to feel liberated and emancipated from what could be fundamentally oppressive conditions against which an autonomous choice of freedom can be exercised and made available by women."²¹ But sexual harassment at the workplace continues unabated, despite the enactment of the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (Prohibition, Prevention and Redressal) Act 2013. In 2014, 526 cases of such harassment were reported, out of which 457 cases were at placed related to work, not at the workplace itself.²² Out of the current sample, 17.5% reported having been sexually harassed at their workplaces.

¹⁷ Maracek, J., (1975). Power and women's psychological disorders. Preliminary observations. Paper presented at symposium on women: studies of power and powerlessness. At the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, Illinois.

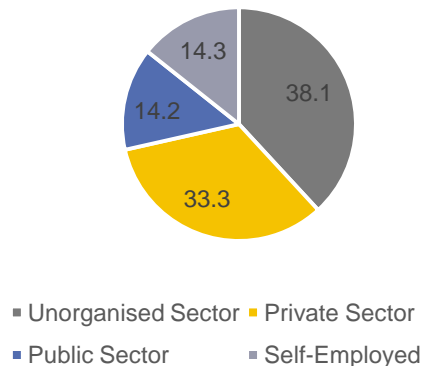
¹⁸ Nelson, D.L., & Burke, R.J, *Women executives: health, stress and success*, THE ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE, 14, 107- 21 (2000).

¹⁹ Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, *Solid Investments: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital* 4 (1995).

²⁰ JUSTICE VERMA COMMITTEE, REPORT ON AMENDMENTS TO CRIMINAL LAW 1, 122 (Dr. Ranbir Singh ed., Nat'l Law Univ. Delhi 2013).

²¹ Ibidat 127.

²² 526 Cases of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace in 2014, THE INDIAN EXPRESS (Aug 05, 2015), <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/526-cases-of-sexual-harassment-at-workplace-in-2014-maneka-gandhi/> (Last visited on Sep 06, 2015).

Figure 8: Sector-Wise Harassment Profile**(iii) Transportation Issues:**

32.5% feel that transportation to and from their workplaces is a challenge, 35.8% reporting that they face safety issues in the transport that they do use.

The challenges analysed above have a daily impact on the professional lives of working women in urban India. While family opposition, guilt and anxiety are the dominant issues in the personal arena, discrimination and harassment hinder women's professional progress. The impact of these has been that 46.7% of women have considered quitting their job; even 39.2% of women who would like continue working as a matter of choice have thought about leaving their jobs. 60% reported having female co-workers who had to quit their jobs because of the same issues.

CONCLUSION- WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Jessie Bernard in 1981 argued that the status of women cannot be compared with that of men; men have a higher status because they are usually stronger, better educated, more logical, less emotional, and possess a better and more practical skill-set than women. This concept of 'inferiority' is so deeply ingrained in women, and their socio-psychological conditioning is so strong, they themselves sometimes believe that they are incapable of competing with men, even if circumstances force them to step out to earn. The personal challenges that this paper has presented are mostly psychological, that women inflict upon themselves based on societal perceptions of 'family' and what women's role and contribution to this institution ought to be.

Society is continuously evolving and one hopes for a progressive perspective, more conducive to viewing working women as the norm rather than an exception. In the meantime, there are steps employers may take to eliminate workplace challenges, and boost the confidence and morale of female employees. 'Equal work, equal pay' should be the motto of all organisations, and gender-discrimination must be done away with. Performance appraisals and promotional opportunities must be equal for both sexes. Efficient complaint-redressal mechanisms for harassment at the workplace must be put in place as well.

Apart from this, employers may consider offering special facilities to women. The survey shows that female employees are not allowed the option of career breaks, where they may take a period of time off to devote to their children, and then return to their earlier job. 'Flexi-time', a privilege often granted to employees in countries like the USA allows women to work flexible hours, and efficiently manage their jobs with their families, is not available to women in India. Facilities such as day-care and crèche for the children of female employees is also rarely provided. 72.5% of the women interviewed said that a flexible-timings/ part-time/ work from home option would allow them to balance their work and their families, and continue working. 40% said that an option of family-care leave or a career break would allow them to look after their children, and return to work without guilt; 25% would like to have employer-provided day-care/ crèche facilities for their children. 18.3% felt that if their commute was made easier and safer through employer-provided transport, they would like to continue working. These measures may encourage other women to take up employment, and lead to an overall improvement in the status of women in India.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SUBJECTS OF THE STUDY**I. PERSONAL DETAILS**

1. Which sector do you work in? Private/ Public or Govt./ Self-Employed/ Unorganized
2. Income Group (in Rs. per annum): Below 1,00,000/ 1,00,000-5,00,000/ 5,00,000- 10,00,000/ Above 10,00,000
3. Highest Educational Qualification: 10th Pass/ 12th Pass/ Graduate/ Post-Graduate/ Professional/ PhD
4. Marital Status: Single/ Married
5. Do you have any children? Yes/ No

6. Do you have a support system for your children at home (joint family, day-care, domestic help etc.)? Yes/ No

II. MOTIVATION TO WORK

1. What is your motivation for working?
 - Own choice/ Independence
 - Supplementing the Family Income
 - Sole Bread-Winner of the Family/ Forced to Work
2. Given a choice, would you continue to work? Yes/ No

III. PERSONAL CHALLENGES

1. Have you faced opposition to your work from your family? Yes/ No
2. If you answered 'yes' to the above, whom do you face such opposition from?
 - Parents
 - Your partner
 - In-Laws
 - Your Children
3. Are you able to maintain a balance between your work and family life? Yes/ No
4. If you answered 'no' to 3, do you experience guilt at not being able to balance your work and family life? Yes/ No
5. Do you experience guilt at having to leave your children at home (if applicable)? Yes/ No
6. Have you experienced fear, anxiety or depression due to your work interfering with your family life, or workplace pressure? Yes/ No

IV. CHALLENGES AT THE WORKPLACE

1. Does your workplace make you feel inferior to your male counterpart? Yes/ No
2. Are you paid salaries comparable to those of male contemporaries? Yes/ No
3. Do you feel that your opinions are accepted, or at least respected, by your superiors? Yes/ No
4. Have you faced discrimination because of your gender at your work? Yes/ No
5. Are promotional avenues equal for men and women at your workplace? Yes/ No
6. Have you ever been sexually harassed at your workplace? Yes/ No
7. Is transportation to and from your workplace a challenge for you? Yes/ No
8. If you answered 'yes' to the above, please pick the difficulty you face with respect to transportation:
 - Finding Conveyance
 - Safety Issues
 - Other Issues (please specify): _____

V. IMPACT OF CHALLENGES

1. Have you considered quitting your job due to any of the factors in the above two sections? Yes/ No
2. Have any of your female coworkers quit their jobs due to any of the factors in the above two sections? Yes/ No
3. Which of the following factors would encourage you to continue working?
 - Family-care Leave/ Career Break
 - Flexi-Time/ Part-Time Options
 - Employer- Provided Daycare/ Crèche facilities for your children
 - Employer- Provided transport to and from your workplace