JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Challenges Faced By Women Employees In The IT Sector: Insights From Indian Organizations

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Abstract

The study examines the perceptions of women employees regarding challenges faced by women employees within organizations. Data was collected from 200 employees occupying senior, middle, and executive-level roles in four IT organizations based in India. The Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.892, and the Pearson correlation was 0.937 ($p<0.001$). Factor analysis of the challenges faced by women employee's component revealed three key factors across the four IT organizations: "Policy Delusion", "Patterns of Perceived Equity & Conflict" and "Patterns of Bait". The findings suggest that these factors are significant sources of cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and organizational challenges at the psychological level, which women employees at senior, middle, and executive levels experience due to gender-related issues in the Indian workplace.

Keywords: Challenge faced by Women Employees; Glass-ceiling; Women in Indian Organizations

1. Introduction

The emergence of gender-related behaviours in organizations can generally be categorized into three models: biological, socialization, and structural/cultural (Bartol, 2003; Powell, 2003). Research on gender and management has led to a debate centred on similarities and differences, with studies on women in management often becoming polarized or marginalized. Scholars have emphasized the importance of considering the "biological, social, and often domestic reality of being female, and how this interacts with workplace conditions" (Rees, 2003). Women face greater obstacles and use different strategies for career advancement compared to their male counterparts (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Being a woman in the workforce requires additional awareness of gender biases and an understanding of workplace inequality. Moreover, working mothers often face stereotypes suggesting they are less serious or reliable for managerial positions because their family responsibilities are perceived to take priority; this dichotomy perpetuates the myth that successful executives cannot manage multiple responsibilities. As a result, women are often not taken seriously at work. To ensure equal pay, career satisfaction, and full utilization of qualified managers' capabilities, changes in workplace attitudes and behaviours are necessary. An individual's psychological makeup can influence their perception of and response to gender-based challenges at work. Social psychologists have spent decades studying cognitive heuristics and perceptual biases that, despite their functional roles, can lead to inaccurate conclusions about social events and people (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

In the workplace, expectations about how work should be done, the traits needed for success, and who should do the work often conflict with prevailing stereotypes about women and their behaviour. In an interesting study it was reported that as gender minorities, women directors' visibility on boards can create performance pressures on these women. To counter gender-based prejudices, women directors consciously alter their behaviors and project both male and female traits consistent with the director role. By doing so, women directors overcome tokenistic

stereotypes and are accepted as part of the director in-group, irrespective of their numeric representation on the board (Bhardwaj, Morgan, and Elms, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to explore the emerging and established expressions of bias and gender/sex discrimination in modern organizations. However, it is important to note that most current theoretical insights on challenges faced by women employees are based on studies conducted in Western countries, and while this research area is broad, it has been underexplored in the Indian context especially with respect to women working at middle managerial level. To address this gap, this study examines the perceptions of challenges faced by women employees among female professional managers in India, a society known for high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980).

Theoretically, this paper makes two contributions. First, it explores the reasons behind women employees' perceptions of challenges faced by women employees in Indian organizations. Second, it identifies emerging factors of challenges faced by women employees that contribute to existing literature on women's experiences in organizations, particularly within the Indian context. This study focuses on investigating challenges faced by women employees as perceived by women in the Indian IT sector. Specifically, it looks into the perceptions of women employees at middle, lower, and upper managerial levels in four similar types of organizations. Therefore, understanding the reasons behind women's perceptions of challenges faced by women employees is crucial for analysing how organizations can eliminate discrimination and offer equal opportunities in the workplace.

2. Literature Review

In an article featured in a WSJ Special Report on *The Corporate Woman*, the authors highlighted a corporate world where women's access to top positions is hindered by corporate traditions and prejudice. Key reasons cited include the belief that women are easily distracted from their careers by family responsibilities, stereotypes about women's ability to succeed in the competitive business environment, and a caste system that relegates women to peripheral roles in business. However, the authors concluded that the most significant barrier women face is the most intangible one: "Men at the top feel uncomfortable beside them." A recent study reported that senior male employees acknowledge the challenges their female counterparts face concerning promotion. Senior male employees' views on the value of gender-diverse leadership underscore the illusion of a "level playing field" because of a gender-neutral performance policy and a family–friendly policy for women. Nonetheless, the study notes a divergence in senior male employees' perspectives about the professional progression of female employees (based majorly on age and ethnicity). The study concludes that the organizational culture and leadership that underpin poor female career progression are embedded in and driven by the culture in the empirical context (Pepple, Oseghale, and Nmecha, 2024).

Gender stereotypes are central to many perceptions of the workplace and the individuals who operate within it (Heilman, 2001). These perceptions are shaped by cognitive representations of category-based traits and attributes, alongside normative beliefs about what is deemed appropriate for individuals based on their gender. Stereotype-driven processing often fails to accurately capture employees' true skills, attributes, and motives, resulting in a self-perpetuating system of unequal treatment between men and women in the workplace. Understanding how an individual's psychological makeup can influence their perception of and response to gender-based challenges, and how these biases often drive key organizational decisions, helps explain the persistence of gender inequality in the workplace.

Metaphorically described as the 'glass ceiling' effect (Catalyst, 1990; Scandura, 1992; Rothausen, 2001), this phenomenon suggests that while women may successfully enter managerial hierarchies, they encounter an invisible barrier that prevents further upward movement (Morrison et al., 1987). The glass ceiling concept specifically asserts that the obstacles women face in promotion relative to men become more pronounced as they ascend the hierarchy. Although employers and top managers may permit women to occupy lower managerial positions, they tend to obstruct their access to positions of "real" power. Women, especially those in executive roles, confront this hard reality of the glass ceiling, regardless of the number of women employed or in management positions (Dingell, 2002). Consequently, women are often denied promotions to senior management roles, and this underrepresentation at the top persists across various occupations, industries, and countries (Goodman, 2003).

Several mechanisms contribute to this obstruction, including outdated sexism, women managers' exclusion from critical informal networks, and more subtle sexist attitudes that place women at a disadvantage. In summary, discrimination against women manifests in various forms, such as job segregation, wage disparities, sexual harassment, lack of career development opportunities and mentoring, poor performance evaluations, work-family conflict, and barriers to promotion. The following section provides an overview of these seven manifestations of challenges that women employees face, which are explored in this study.

2.1 Performance Evaluations

A significant portion of research on performance evaluations focuses on the impact of ratee gender on evaluation outcomes (Davison & Burke, 2000; Gunderson et al., 1996; Maurer & Taylor, 1994; Robbins & De Nisi, 1993; Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1988). Much of this research examines whether a pro-male bias exists and the reasons behind it. The majority of studies have concentrated on the gender of the ratee as the primary cause of differences in ratings (Gunderson et al., 1996), while others have explored how social cognitive factors, such as stereotypes and prejudices, influence these evaluations (Martell, 1996). Social-cognitive theory posits that most raters possess well-established gender stereotypes (Swim & Sanna, 1996), which link specific behaviors and characteristics to men and women. According to Del Boca and Ashmore (1980), the male stereotype is associated with positively valued traits such as competence, rationality, and assertiveness, while the female stereotype is linked to warmth and expressiveness (Fiske, 1998). DeNisi et al. (1984) proposed that raters who hold traditional stereotypes about women tend to associate them with ineffectiveness and often attribute poor performance to them. In contrast, raters who hold less traditional views of women do not typically attribute low performance to women or view them as ineffective. Numerous studies have supported the idea that gender-based stereotypes can bias performance evaluations (Robbins & De Nisi, 1993).

2.2 Denial of Career Development Opportunities and Mentoring

Gender-related barriers often prevent women from developing the interpersonal relationships and career guidance essential to mentoring (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Although women are willing to mentor, they face greater challenges than men in organizations (Ragins & Scandura, 1994). Mentoring can offer career benefits to women (Dreher & Cox, Jr., 1996), but only if organizations implement strategies that ensure access to mentoring opportunities. Female mentors, in particular, are reported to provide more socio-emotional support than male mentors (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). While career support is an important aspect of mentoring, the combination of career and psychosocial support from female mentors tends to lead to more significant career advancement for women (Tharenou, 2005). This suggests that women and men may require different types of mentoring relationships.

However, due to the potential for misperceptions or concerns about impropriety, many men avoid serving as mentors (Ragins & Cotton, 1993). As a result, women are often denied not only career guidance but also the emotional support and valuable insights that male mentors, with their access to networks and experiences, can provide. an exploration could provide unique insights into how patriarchal societal and occupational culture, as well as (limited) family–friendly policies for women, influence the configuration of men's views of gendered occupational segregation (Pepple, Oseghale, and Nmecha, 2024). Consequently, women must chart their own career paths, distinct from those historically available to men, if they wish to break through the glass ceiling.

2.3 Discrimination and Harassment

Discrimination against women remains a persistent global issue, as seen in countries like India (Maatman, 2000; Shaffer et al., 2000). Many nations, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States, have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex (Barak, 1997; Shaffer et al., 2000). These laws impose criminal and/or individual penalties for such behaviour (Maatman, 2000). However, despite these legal protections, women still face lower earnings, status, and fewer opportunities in managerial positions compared to

men, which serves as evidence that discrimination persists (Roos & Gatta, 2001). Sexual harassment, a form of sex discrimination, is one manifestation of the broader issue of employment-related discrimination against women. This harassment can be perpetrated by managers, supervisors, peers, or subordinates (Paetzold & O'Leary-Kelly, 1996). Many regions have laws prohibiting sexual harassment, though the rigor and enforcement of these laws vary. Researchers have identified three key psychological dimensions of sexual harassment that are consistent across different countries: sexual coercion, gender harassment, and unwanted sexual attention (Gelfand et al., 1995). The persistence and widespread nature of sexual harassment are often explained by gender-based factors (Welsh, 1999).

2.4 Job Segregation

Job segregation, or occupational sex segregation, results from overt discrimination, where gender is used as a criterion in employment-related decisions. This includes behaviours such as refusing to hire women, paying them inequitably, or directing them to "women's jobs." It has long been a significant factor in shaping women's employment experiences. Research consistently shows that job segregation reinforces sex inequality, with women more likely to occupy low-level, undervalued positions that offer limited access to prestigious job assignments (Blair-Loy, 2001; Burt, 1998; Knoke & Ishio, 1998). These roles act as "glass cages," isolating women and limiting their career advancement opportunities.

Although job segregation has decreased over the past three decades, many jobs remain significantly sex-segregated (Bose & Whaley, 2001). Discrimination against women in management, whether driven by cultural prejudices within a society or an industry (Dingell, 2002), results in those in power being able to block change. A report on these issues highlights societal, governmental, and internal structural barriers contributing to the glass ceiling. Indeed, seven of the ten most common jobs for women are sex-segregated (e.g., secretaries, cashiers, registered nurses, nursing aides, elementary school teachers, and servers; Bose & Whaley, 2001). These roles are typically characterized by low pay, low status, and limited career advancement opportunities (Reskin, 1997).

Women's occupational sex segregation, along with the associated low status, limited career ladders, and low wages, is a widespread issue across the globe (Shaffer et al., 2000). Women in such roles are also more likely to face higher levels of sexual harassment (Gruber, 1998; Mainiero, 2020). Furthermore, in many of these lower-status positions, women are far more likely to be supervised by men rather than women (Gutek & Morasch, 1982), which increases their risk of harassment by male superiors.

2.5 Wage Gap

The glass ceiling has a range of effects, and its consequences are evident in its very definition that women's upward mobility is hindered by multiple barriers. One of the key consequences of the glass ceiling is the persistent pay gap between men and women, which is most pronounced for women who are on the cusp of, or have already broken through, the glass ceiling (Morris, 2005). Research consistently shows that women continue to earn less than their male counterparts, even in managerial positions, with full-time female managers earning less than their male peers (Dingell, 2002; Nagore and García Martín, 2024).

While executive women and men share many similarities, including pay grade and work attitudes, there are significant differences. Executive women typically have less authority, receive lower total compensation, enjoy fewer international mobility opportunities, and face greater pressures from family obligations (Catalyst, 2003b; Catalyst, 2003a; Lyness & Thompson, 1997). As women ascend to executive roles, the wage gap becomes even more pronounced, suggesting that compensation structures may include an invisible "blue line" that women struggle to cross. This indicates that the existing compensation frameworks may be inherently biased and unfair to women.

2.6 Work-Family Conflict

Although researchers have long studied female managers through the "think leader, think male" paradigm (Heilman, 2001), an area that has not been fully explored is the role of managers' perceptions of their subordinates' work and family demands as a link to women's career outcomes (Rasheed, Iqbal, and Mustafa, 2018). Antal and Izraeli (1993) argue that the greatest challenge for women in management is the pervasive stereotype that "manager equals male." Social role theory (Eagly, 1987) explains that gender-typical roles ascribed to men and women shape expectations about appropriate behaviors and influence beliefs about their own abilities and skills.

This theory also presents a double bind for female managers: they are often (1) seen as less effective in managerial roles and (2) associated with nurturing, communal roles, based on stereotypes such as the belief that women, due to child-rearing responsibilities, are less committed to their careers (Mattis, 2002). Furthermore, caregiving roles are often seen as incompatible with leadership (Lewis, 2001; Liff & Ward, 2001). The implication is that these caregiving stereotypes can hinder women's careers. In a recent study conducted on women engineers, it was reported that as they negotiate their "engineering" and "woman" identities, the work–family conflict manifests as a battle of time and responsibilities, psychological strain and behavior-based conflict. Furthermore, self-expectations and negative social sanctions play an important role in augmenting the experiences of these conflicts. The results also reveal how women re-strategize their career decisions to conciliate their conflicting identities (Purang, Dutta and Biwalkar, 2024).

Social role theory suggests that women are typically viewed from a non-work, caregiving perspective, making their non-work demands more salient to colleagues (Hoobler, 2007). This results in a work-family conflict, where the pressures from both domains are incompatible. Studies have argued that participation in one role, such as work, can complicate participation in another, such as family, making it harder to balance both roles effectively (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Bertola, Colombo, Fedi, and Martini, 2023). Research indicates that men are often seen as more agentic and competent, while women are viewed as more expressive, communal, nurturing, and supportive (Diekman & Eagly, 2000). The conflict between work and family is significant for both individuals and organizations, as it is linked to negative outcomes such as absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, turnover, and poorer physical and mental health (Hoobler et al., 2009). Consequently, work-family conflict arises when one role interferes with participation in another, leading to potential conflict and negative workplace behaviours.

2.7 Women Promotability

Although the number of professional women has increased in recent years, the reality for women remains characterized by lower wages and slower career advancement (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000), likely due to persistent stereotypes about women's lack of fit in certain roles. Studies have established a link between sex and both (1) person-organization fit (the alignment between an individual's values and the organization's values) and (2) person-job fit (the alignment between an individual's skills and job requirements). However, organizations are not gender-neutral; the contrast between stereotypes ascribed to women (e.g., nurturing and caring) and to men (e.g., tough and achievement-oriented) often leads to the assumption that women will perform poorly in managerial roles (Lyness & Heilman, 2006).

Research has shown that even 15 years after Schein (1973) coined the phrase "think leader, think male," little had changed in the perception of male and female managers. Being a woman often signals femininity, which is associated with perceptions of reduced managerial ability (Powell et al., 2002), less effective leadership (Eagly et al., 2003), and fewer attributions for organizational successes (Heilman & Haynes, 2005). Furthermore, managers' perceptions of fit—whether an employee aligns with the organization's values and job requirements—are linked to both subordinates' reports of having been nominated for promotion and managers' assessments of their promotability.

Evidence from person-organization fit research suggests that decision-makers are more likely to evaluate favorably those who are perceived to fit well (Bretz et al., 1993). Person categorization theory supports this, as it

explains that when managers form impressions of subordinates, they tend to confirm their assessments through resource allocation, such as promotions (Liden et al., 1993). Employees who align with the organization's values and behaviours—those who "fit"—are more likely to receive indicators of career success, such as promotions (Bretz & Judge, 1994). Hoobler et al. (2009) argue that promotions and promotability are often linked to how well subordinates fit their roles, based on assumptions that those who fit perform better (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) and possess greater job-related skills (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Further, studies have indicate that female employees were less likely to get promoted compared to male employees despite having similar work experiences (Waqar, Hanif, and Loh, 2021).

Lyness and Heilman (2006) suggest that a lack of job fit leads to negative perceptions and lower performance evaluations, especially for women, as a lack of fit is often associated with fewer promotions. Person categorization theory further implies that when managers categorize an employee as a good or bad fit for a job, they are likely to act in ways that confirm these perceptions when deciding whether to allocate rewards, such as promotions.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive survey design, which, as noted by Ezeani (1998), is aimed at gathering detailed and factual information to describe an existing phenomenon. A comprehensive literature review was conducted before selecting the research topic. The focus of the study was to explore the factors affecting challenges faced by women employees, with the goal of offering insights that could help organizations eliminate discrimination and provide equal opportunities in the workplace. Specifically, the study investigates the perceptions of women employees regarding challenges faced by women employees in Indian organizations.

This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining these perceptions, particularly in the Indian context. It is anticipated that the emerging factors of challenges faced by women employees identified will contribute to existing research in this area. The target population for the study consisted of 200 managers from upper, middle, and lower levels, selected from four similar types of organizations based in northern India. A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across the three managerial levels. The selection process aimed to include respondents with varying levels of work experience: two, five, and ten years. This approach was intended to better understand whether experience and exposure within the organization influence perceptions of challenges faced by women employees. The breakdown of the sample is as follows:

A: Organization:OPQ*

Senior Level Managers **8**

Middle Level Managers **18**

Executive Level **24**

Total **50**

***Changed Names**

B: Organization:SMR*

Senior Level Managers **4**

Middle Level Managers **15**

Executive Level **31**

Total **50**

***Changed Names**

C: Organization:QLM*

Senior Level Managers **9**

Middle Level Managers **14**

Executive Level **27**

Total **50**

***Changed Names**

D:	**Organization:KJO***	Executive Level	**31**
	Senior Level Managers	Total	**50**
	4		
	Middle Level Managers	***Changed Names**	
	15		

3.1 Instrument

A set of seven measures were selected for this study after an extensive review of relevant literature. These measures included job segregation, wage gaps, sexual harassment, denial of career development opportunities and mentoring, poor performance evaluations, work-family conflict, and women's promotability. A structured questionnaire was designed to collect data on these aspects, with clear instructions provided for each section.

The first section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information, such as age, work experience, professional status, marital status, and job position. The second section incorporated items from various studies, including those of Maurer & Taylor (1994), Lyness and Thompson (2000), Shaffer et al. (2000), Bose and Whaley (2001), Dingell (2002), Hoobler (2007), Catalyst (2003b, 2003a), and Hoobler et al. (2009).

To assess the validity of the questionnaire, the expert judgment method was used. The developed questionnaire, including explanations of key terms and concepts, was presented to four university professors and eight managers (two from each of the four IT organizations involved in the study). Their feedback focused on the construct, content, formal appearance, and writing style of the questionnaire. Based on their input, revisions were made to certain questions, including additions and deletions. Following these changes, the content and construct validity of the questionnaire were assured and confirmed by other experts.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 56 items that measured participants' perceptions, work behaviours, and attitudes toward challenges faced by women employees in their organizations. These items were scored on a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 5 (I strongly agree).

To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot survey was conducted in various organizations, with women employees from upper, middle, and lower managerial levels completing the survey. The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Pearson correlation. The modified instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.892 and a Pearson correlation of 0.937 ($p<0.001$), indicating high reliability for the questionnaire.

4. Analysis

To assess the adequacy of the sample size and the meaningfulness of the correlation matrix, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied. This test measures the sampling adequacy, with a value greater than 0.60 typically indicating that the sample size is sufficient for factor analysis. Additionally, the Bartlett test of sphericity was used to check if the correlation matrix is significantly different from the identity matrix, ensuring that the data is suitable for factor analysis.

Following this, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using the maximum likelihood approach to determine the factor structure and the loadings of the identified variables. The Varimax orthogonal rotation method was employed to interpret the factor structure and clarify the relationship between the variables.

After EFA, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using Lisrel 8.7 to verify the fit of the factor model obtained from the exploratory analysis. Several fitness indices were used to evaluate the model's adequacy. These indices include:

- **Chi-square index**: Tests the null hypothesis that the model fits the data perfectly. A non-significant result ($p > 0.05$) suggests good fit.
- **Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)**: Measures the goodness of fit between the observed data and the model; values closer to 1 indicate a better fit.
- **Comparative Fit Index (CFI)**: Assesses the improvement in fit compared to a null model, with values above 0.90 indicating a good fit.
- **Normed Fit Index (NFI)**: Indicates how well the model fits compared to a baseline model, with values above 0.90 being desirable.
- **Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)**: Similar to NFI but adjusts for model complexity, with values above 0.90 considered good.
- **Incremental Fit Index (IFI)**: Reflects the improvement in fit relative to a baseline model, with values above 0.90 signifying a good fit.
- **Related Fit Index (RFI)**: Compares the fit of the model to a baseline, with values above 0.90 indicating an adequate fit.
- **Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)**: Adjusts the GFI for degrees of freedom, with values closer to 1 indicating a good fit.
- **Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)**: A measure of how well the model approximates the population covariance matrix, with values less than 0.05 indicating good fit.
- **Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)**: Represents the residuals after fitting the model, with lower values indicating better fit.

A model is considered to have a good fit when CFI, GFI, NFI, NNFI, IFI, RFI, and AGFI values are above 0.90, and RMSEA and RMR values are below 0.05, as per the guidelines suggested by Alexopoulos and Kalaitzidis (2004).

4.1 Results

Table 1 shows some of the demographic characteristics. As it is indicated in the table, majority (64%) of the employees across four organizations fall between the age group 18 – 39 years of age signifying a considerably younger workforce in the sample study; and around 68% of the employees fall in the 1st category of pay package (i.e. between 2-300,000 INR) followed by the 2nd category (i.e. between 3-500,000 INR). See Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution in accordance with Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Factor	Percentage (%)
Age	
18-29 years	64%
30-39 years	32%
40-49 years	4%
Professional Status & Position	
Senior Level	4%

Demographic Factor	Percentage (%)
Middle Level	34%
Executive Level	62%
Pay Package	
Between 2-300,000 INR	68%
Between 3-500,000 INR	18%
INR 500,000 and Above	14%
Marital Status	
Married	27%
Unmarried	73%

4.1.1 Challenges Faced by Women Employees

In the analysis of challenges faced by women employees, the first step involved calculating the correlation between each identified variable and evaluating the internal consistency of all variables within the component. To assess the adequacy of the sample size, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was used, ensuring that the sample size was sufficient for factor analysis. Additionally, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was applied to check whether the correlation matrix was significantly different from zero, which is a necessary condition for conducting factor analysis. Both tests yielded results that were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that factor analysis could proceed.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Details:

After confirming the sample sufficiency and the meaningfulness of the correlation matrix, the exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood estimation method. This was followed by Varimax rotation to interpret the factors. The analysis revealed that three distinct factors emerged from the component "challenges faced by women employees". These factors accounted for the following percentage of total variance:

- **First Factor**: 44.153% of the total variance
- **Second Factor**: 12.912% of the total variance
- **Third Factor**: 6.800% of the total variance

In total, these three factors together explained **63.865%** of the total variance of the variables in the component. This means that the three factors successfully captured the majority of the variance in the data, making them significant and relevant for further interpretation and analysis of challenges faced by women employees. This method helped identify the key underlying dimensions of challenges faced by women employees in the workplace, which could provide insights into the different barriers women face in organizations, such as wage gaps, job segregation, and career development obstacles. As regards this component, the following variables formed the 1st factor:

1. Performance Evaluation
2. Job Segregation
3. Women Promotability

The 2nd factor was formed by the following variables:

1. Wage Gaps
2. Work-Family Conflict

The 3rd factor was formed by the following variables:

1. Denial of Career Development Opportunities and Mentoring

2. Discrimination and Harassment

Table 2: **Challenges Faced by Women Employees**

Code Variable	1st factor	2nd factor	3rd factor	t-value	R2
1. Denial of Career Development Opportunities and Mentoring			0.687	5.57*	0.56
2. Wage Gaps		0.557		5.26*	0.45
3. Discrimination and Harassment			0.400	4.70*	0.41
4. Performance Evaluations	0.656			5.42*	0.58
5. Work-Family Conflict		0.678		6.79	0.89
6. Job Segregation	0.567			6.62 *	0.20
7. Women Promotability	0.760			5.68*	0.53

* t>1.96.

In Table 2, the confirmatory factor analysis was made with the use of the software "Lisrel 8.7" for 'challenges faced by women employees' and then the fitness of the factors achieved was determined (Table 3). After the earlier stated stage, the first, second and third factors of the component challenges faced by women employees were the approved factors named: "Policy Delusion"; "Patterns of Perceived Equity & Conflict" and "Patterns of Bait" respectively.

The Three Identified Factors were:

1. **Policy Delusion:** This factor reflects the perception that organizations may have policies aimed at gender equality, but in practice, these policies are not effectively implemented or enforced. Women might be exposed to policies that appear progressive on paper but fail to result in tangible improvements in their career opportunities, promotions, or pay equality.

2. **Patterns of Perceived Equity & Conflict:** This factor captures the perception that women often feel that they are treated unfairly in terms of recognition, pay, and career opportunities when compared to their male counterparts. Women may feel that there is an inherent bias or inequality in how men and women are treated within the workplace, contributing to a sense of injustice and discouragement.

3. **Patterns of Bait:** This factor refers to the situation where women may be lured into accepting promotions or career development opportunities under the guise of advancement, only to discover that these opportunities are often hollow or come with hidden barriers. Women may experience career stagnation or face increased challenges once they have been promoted or placed in higher positions, leading to disillusionment.

Fitness of the Factors (Table 3):

The fitness of these factors was determined through various fit indices, which showed that the model met the necessary criteria for good fit, ensuring that these factors were valid representations of the challenges women face in the workplace. This confirms that the identified factors—Policy Delusion, Patterns of Perceived Equity & Conflict, and Patterns of Bait—are meaningful and relevant to understanding gender-based workplace challenges in India, providing a foundation for targeted organizational interventions.

In summary, the confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the robustness of the three factors identified in the earlier exploratory factor analysis and established their relevance in explaining the challenges women face in the Indian workplace. These factors serve as valuable insights for organizations to address and mitigate gender-based discrimination and inequality effectively.

Table 3: Fitness indexes calculated for the component "Challenges Faced by Women Employees".

Component/Index	Root Mean Square error of approx (RMSEA)	Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	Normed Fit Index (NFI)	Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)	Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	Related Fit Index (RFI)	AGFI	RMR	X^2	P Value
Challenges Faced by Women Employees	0.0013	0.92	0.90	0.85	0.89	0.90	0.81	0.74	0.031	20.13	p>0.05

5. Discussion

The findings of this research shed light on three significant factors related to workplace challenges faced by women employees in India. These factors reveal that women in India encounter distinct gender-based stereotypes, which differ from those faced by their Western counterparts, particularly Caucasian women. This distinction is rooted in India's unique cultural context, characterized by high uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, femininity, long-term orientation, and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980). These cultural dimensions contribute to unique barriers and stereotypes that women experience in the workplace.

The study highlights that the findings from Western studies on challenges faced by women employees (e.g., Baltes & Parker, 2000b; Martell, 1996; Martell & Guzzo, 1991; Martell & Willis, 1993; Bose & Whaley, 2001; Rice, 1994) cannot be easily generalized to the Indian context. Despite the common presence of the "glass wall"—an invisible barrier hindering women's professional advancement—the effects of these barriers vary significantly between Western and Indian women, influenced by their respective social and psychological mindsets, and the cultural and contextual factors at play (Martell, 1996; Catalyst, 1990). In India, these challenges are compounded by both cultural and organizational contexts.

Key Findings and Contributions:

- The research identifies three factors related to challenges faced by women employees that uniquely affect women in India, especially in the technology-driven business environment. The study underlines the complexity and transformation of the Indian workforce, where women perceive and prioritize challenges differently, based on both cognitive and emotional factors, as well as interpersonal and organizational issues.

- The study also highlights that informal networking and mentoring are often recommended as strategies for women's career advancement. However, these strategies are not always effective. Networking and mentoring with male executives can be problematic for junior women, who may face assumptions of sexual involvement with their mentors, particularly for women of colour (Thomas, 1989). This adds a layer of complexity to challenges faced by women employees. However, on the contrary, a study conducted in the west confirm employees' decreased preference for masculine and increased preference for feminine leadership traits in 2020 compared to 2005. Nevertheless, Dutch employees still favored masculine over feminine leadership traits in 2020, contrary to the findings by Powell *et al.* (2021). These observed changes in the managerial stereotype could prove to be an important step forward for women's advancement to management and leadership positions (Feenstra, Stoker, Lammers and Garretsen, 2023).

- A significant contribution of this research is the exploration of women employees' perceptions of challenges faced by women employees at different managerial levels in India (upper, middle, and lower).

The study suggests that understanding these perceptions can help organizations identify strategic gaps, such as issues related to employee turnover among talented women and take corrective actions to mitigate their negative impact.

- By addressing these challenges, organizations can improve their overall workplace efficiency and gender equality, which could have positive implications not only within individual organizations but also across industries as other organizations are likely to adopt similar practices, as indicated by Abrahamson's (1996) theory of organizational imitation.

Implications:

The study's findings provide a valuable roadmap for organizations in India to develop strategies for mitigating gender bias and advancing workplace equality. These efforts will not only contribute to greater workplace efficiency but also support the broader agenda of achieving gender equality in Indian organizations, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women professionals (Rapoport et al., 2001; Loumpourdi, 2023). By addressing these workplace challenges, Indian organizations can enhance their reputation as progressive employers, attracting and retaining talented women.

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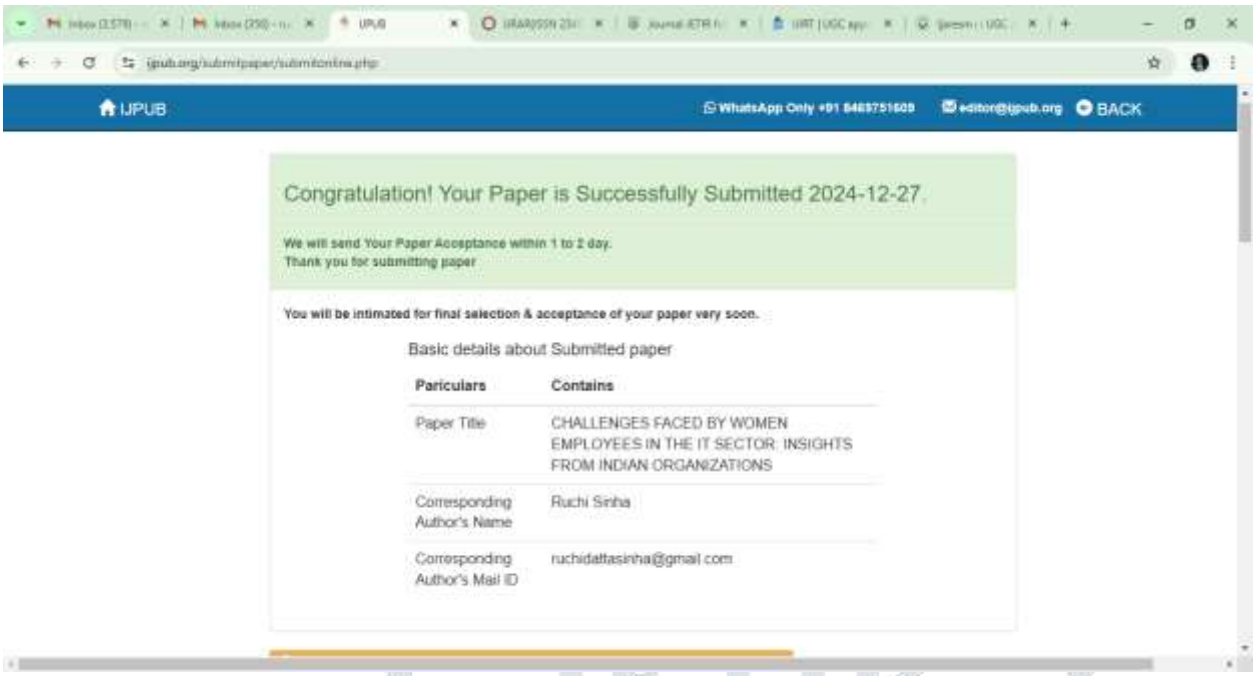
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