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A Mixed Methods Study on Career Satisfaction of Women IT Professionals

Merin John¹, J.S. Gunavathy²

Abstract

In the present context of increased options for labour mobility, different genres of job moves are possible – job moves based on convenience, job moves for monetary reasons, job moves to realise one's potential and so on. Gone are the days when employees sought after a secured job and aspired to retire in the employing organisation after long years of service. Increasingly, employees have become empowered to focus on experience on the job, organisational justice, work engagement, job satisfaction, and career satisfaction and so on. This paper encapsulates career satisfaction among married women IT professionals (n = 50) in Kerala by using a mixed methodology. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaire and qualitative data through in-depth interviews. The association between personal variables and career satisfaction and the insights regarding career satisfaction are presented.

Keywords: *Career Satisfaction, women IT professionals, mixed methods, Kerala*

Introduction

The term 'Career' refers to the work experience outcomes, such as status, promotions and salary that are objectively observable (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001). Traditional career research focused predominantly on objective measures of career success and satisfaction (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988). This focus was consistent with the predominance of hierarchical organisations where employees' career success was largely defined by promotion, rank and retention (Hall and Chandler, 2005).

While traditionally a career was considered to be confined to professionals or those who advanced through organisational

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hierarchies, today the term 'career' is more broadly applied and is commonly considered to be the lifelong sequence of role-related experiences of individuals (Hall, 2002). Building on this definition, 'career' can be defined as the "positive psychological and work-related outcomes accumulated as a result of one's work experiences" (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001).

Careers have been defined as a sequence of separate but related positions or work roles encountered by a person over the course of his or her life (Greenhaus et al, 2000). Career satisfaction focuses on the overall affective orientation of the individual toward his or her career or work role (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988). Career success can be measured in the objective sense such as pay and promotion, or the subjective sense that focuses on career satisfaction (Ng et al. 2005). Jiang and Klein (1999) suggested organizations need to capitalise on non-financial desires of their employee's: employers must therefore understand employees' internal desires that lead to career satisfaction.

Greenhaus et al. (1990) defined career satisfaction as the satisfaction an individual derives from the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of his/her career. These aspects include pay, developmental and advancement opportunities (Berry 1998; Greenhaus et al., 1990). It is important to acknowledge that career satisfaction is only one facet of a person's job satisfaction. An employee may be satisfied with their career but may not be satisfied with other facets of their workplace, for example workplace conditions (Rose et al. 2006). Furthermore, empirical distinctions between career satisfaction and job satisfaction have been established (Judge et al., 1995).

There have been many positive outcomes from having higher career satisfaction, such as lower turnover intentions (Igbaria 1991) and higher life satisfaction and enhanced mental health (Hall 2002), organizational commitment (e.g. Carson et al. 1996), support for organizational change (e.g. Gaertner 1989), and even the success of an organization (Judge et al. 1999). Overall, it is clear that understanding career satisfaction is important for employers as it enables them to develop motivated and committed workers (Gattiker and Larwood 1988; Igbaria 1991; Judge et al. 1995). Martins et al. (2002) stated that "understanding the factors that influence an employee's career satisfaction is increasingly important, and updating models in the careers literature to account for current developments in the workforce is essential" (p. 407).

Problem Statement and Scope of the Study

In the present global village, technology has not only widened access to opportunities but also its reach. This has resulted in mobility of labour on a large scale – not merely across locations but also across organisations, across job profiles and across organisational sectors. Gone are the days when employees sought after a secured job and aspired to retire in the employing organisation after long years of service. In the present context of increased options for labour mobility, different genres of job moves are possible – job moves based on convenience, job moves for monetary reasons, job moves to realise one's potential and so on.

It has been argued that the subject of career satisfaction may be best understood when placed within the context of a worker's broader life situation. However, efforts to

empirically relate career satisfaction to larger life contexts are a relatively recent development. The thrusts of these recent efforts have been primarily directed toward explaining variations in global measures of life satisfaction with the thought that quality of life is an important end in itself that might be significantly controlled by varying career-related characteristics.

Researchers suggest that career change is on the rise in our society, which we witness on our daily lives. Values have changed such that people increasingly change work settings in search of greater autonomy, life balance and meaning in work. Both exogenous and individual factors make people shift their career, such as situational factors which determines market conditions to understand the alternatives.

Various patterns of career transitions are evident. For instance, mindless job moves wherein individuals on a job hopping spree depending on market conditions, often make job moves based on compensation and not necessarily based on career aspirations. Similarly, individuals switch jobs in pursuit of their calling or self-actualisation to have larger satisfaction.

Knowledge workers including IT professionals are highly career-mobile individuals and women employees take career breaks to accommodate their work-family demands. In this context, this paper presents the results of a mixed methods study conducted among married women IT professionals in Kerala regarding their career satisfaction.

Understanding Career Satisfaction

The importance for organisational career management is the recognition that there are strong non-monetary factors which

affect work and career satisfaction, and career orientations provide a way of understanding these motivators of career decisions. Many organisational career programmes assume that employees are motivated by the prospect of promotion, but while there is evidence to suggest that employee's promotion aspirations are often underestimated (Herriot et al., 1994). There is also considerable evidence for differences in motivation (Holland, 1973; Greenhaus et al., 2000).

There have been many positive outcomes from having higher career satisfaction, such as lower turnover intentions (Igbaria, 1991), and higher life satisfaction and enhanced mental health (Hall, 2002), organizational commitment (e.g. Carson et al., 1996), support for organizational change (e.g. Gaertner, 1989), and even the success of an organization (Judge et al, 1999). Overall, it is clear that understanding career satisfaction is important for employers as it enables them to develop motivated and committed workers (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Igbaria, 1991; Judge et al, 1995).

Recent researches has shown that although employees are paid well, most of them are not happy about their work, they look for various other factors related to career satisfaction such as working hours, and interest in the work, complex mix of emotional responses that cannot be easily reduced to components. Barth (1993) put forward the organisational benefits of recognising other motivators, as firstly, being a greater understanding of why quality staff choose to leave the organisation and secondly, the ability to target career management systems more effectively and increase career satisfaction through more constructive discussions with employees who might be dissatisfied. If employees remain in

a job that is not congruent with their career anchor and repress their motivations, they seek to achieve the missing elements of their anchor through outside work interests or by withdrawing commitment, which has obvious implications for organisations.

Derr (1986) also suggests that organisations should analyse career orientations in order to determine which career interventions are most appropriate for each career orientation. For example, assessment centres are suited to getting ahead; career counselling to getting secure; career pathing to getting high and getting free etc. In addition to this, Schein (1971) puts forward the case for flexible reward systems, promotion systems and recognition systems to address the differing needs of individuals.

Career Satisfaction and Employee Wellbeing

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines Employee Well-being is defined as “creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organization” (“Employee Well-Being in the Workplace - Talent Culture,” 2014).

Until recently, research on careers assumed that people developed and advanced largely within the confines of a single organization and occupation, and that the transitions paced their career were institutionalised. New developments have dramatically altered this model as we can see many youngsters as well as people in the 40s make dramatic career shift due to dissatisfaction towards their career and transit to the profession they are passionate about. As the myth of life long job security unravels, career development increasingly

involves moving from one firm, sector and occupation to another in search of opportunity and fulfilment. Individuals increasingly develop careers independent of formal organizations as self-employed professionals. These self-designing professional trajectories place a premium on individual's abilities to create, alter and dissolve career roles and identities as their personal and professional situations change. Thus, there are several connotations associated with career transitions. It would take the conventional route of natural progression in the related field of work or could take the radical route of moving or experimenting across unrelated fields or jumping jobs in a mindless or growthless manner. Each nuance has its implications on career satisfaction.

According to Sokanu (2014) there are three important dimensions of career satisfaction namely, (a) career satisfaction is an emotional response to a career situation, (b) career satisfaction is determined by how well outcomes meet or exceed expectations and (c) career satisfaction represents a person's several attitudes towards the different jobs they've carried out.

The linkage between these dimensions of Career Satisfaction and Employee Wellbeing according to Sokanu is discussed below:

- a) Career satisfaction is an emotional response to a career situation. As such, it cannot be seen; it can only be informed. Career Satisfaction is the sum total of various emotional indicators such as self-satisfaction i.e., through utilisation of one's own abilities, skills and talents and the appropriate channelization of resources to maximise the goals, which has a profound impact on the self-esteem and

social desirability as well. Thus at the emotional level, instances of prolonged or profound career dissatisfaction will negatively affect employee mental health.

- b) Career satisfaction is determined by how well outcomes meet or exceed expectations. Researchers have suggested that many career oriented employees do wish to be the star performers of the respective organizations always, for which they themselves set high goals to be achieved by them. Such high performers often tend to break their own records of excellence and redefine the quality of work, which positively contributes to their self-esteem and also helps them move towards self-actualization. Alternatively, such employees may also experience burnout.
- c) Career satisfaction represents a person's several attitudes towards the different jobs they've carried out. Studies have found that many people, often being in particular job roles are not satisfied with their career, they would have profound interest for other professions towards which they are more passionate but due to various factors they could not pursue. In such cases, career satisfaction plays a covert role.

Research Methods

A mixed methodology has been followed for the current paper. Quantitative data was collected from a total of 50 respondents, who were selected using systemised random sampling, these respondents were administered the career satisfaction scale by Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990). Data obtained from quantitative data was analysed using SPSS Version 20.

The aim of integrating qualitative method in this research was to get a deeper understanding of the socio-economic and other factors that impact career satisfaction. A total of 6 in-depth interviews were conducted for the qualitative part of the research. 3 married women IT professionals who have worked in the same organizations (it was decided to interview 6 respondents as it would give more clarity to the study, it was decided 6 due to time - limitation) throughout their career and 3 women who have worked in different organizations were chosen for the interview. The raw data was sorted out into themes and sub-themes relevant to the research objectives and analyzed.

Qualitative data collected from the in-depth interview indicate a difference in the psycho-social structure, perspective towards career and career motivation factors as well. While there were women who believed in autonomy and financial independence irrespective of their partner's decisions and choices, there were respondents who only wanted to build a career so that they could contribute to family income and be supportive of their husbands.

The study also indicated that there was a difference in terms of family support and resilience among respondents. Some of them emphasized more on being example to family and society on how to have a work-life balance along with successful career, while others stressed more on caretaker and service roles on family and regard job as only an identity, not something to be given more importance than family.

Study Results

Section I - Quantitative data

The data obtained from the quantitative method can be summarised as follows:

Table No.1: Association between Personal variables and Career Satisfaction

Variable	Category	Career Satisfaction High level Low level	χ^2	Df	P Value
Age	30-35	9 6	.161	1	.688
	35-40	15 10			
	40-45	6 4			
Education Qualification	Bachelor's	12 3	4.437	1	.035
	Master's	29 6			
	Team Leader	7 3			
Designation	Team Member	33 7	4.121	1	.041
	Upto 2	32 5			
	More than 2	9 4			
Number of Children	10-15	31 3	4.021	1	.44
	15-20	8 2			
	20-25	3 2			
Total Years of Work Experience			4.565	1	.039

Results from the chi-square test of independence in the table No.1 indicates that:

- Age is not associated to career satisfaction ($X^2 = .161$, $p > .05$).
- Educational qualification is associated to career satisfaction ($X^2 = 4.437$, $p < .05$).
- Designation is associated to career satisfaction ($X^2 = 4.121$, $p < .05$).
- Number of children is associated to career satisfaction ($X^2 = 4.021$, $p < .05$).
- Total years of work experience is associated to career satisfaction ($X^2 = 4.565$, $p < .05$).

Thus it can be inferred that among the respondents, career satisfaction was felt irrespective of the age categories, while total years of work experience, designation, educational qualification and number of children did have a significant impact on the career satisfaction.

Section II- Qualitative Data

The raw data is presented under three main themes such as *career choices*, *career transitions*, *career anchors*, which is integrated with existing research findings.

1. Career choices

It can be defined as the selection of a particular path in terms of career based on one's skills, talents, preferences etc.

From the data obtained from the in-depth interview, it can be understood that the career choices are largely influenced by:

1. Family circumstances (Largely Financial Soundness)
2. Family pattern (Traditional, Joint, Nuclear families)

3. Personal factors such as ambition, determination, ability and skill to cope with hardships.
4. Extra support system such as external child care support.

2. Career transitions

Louis (1980) defines career transition as the period during which an individual is changing roles or changing their orientation to a role already held; thus, the term transition suggests both a process of change and the period during which the change is taking place.

There are numerous types of career transitions that involve unanticipated or even undesired shifts in an individual's career path. In addition, the term career transition may refer to the process by which an individual changes from one job to another within the same job family; and it may also refer to a more dramatic career change from one occupational category to an entirely different one. Finally, a career transition takes place when an employee merely shifts to a new position within the same company or organizational structure.

Two broad categories of career transitions are voluntary and involuntary. A voluntary career transition can occur for a host of reasons. In addition to factors that are negative and thus propel the person to depart from the chosen career, other career transitions result from more attractive career options that cause the individual to utilize approach behaviours in changing careers. Cindy Juntunen et al (2002) have also identified other career transition classifications, including (a) maintenance transitions, or changes in the individual's role without a change in the company or job title; (b) advancement transitions, or the opportunity to shift

to a better position; (c) entry or re-entry transitions, or the return of an individual to the workforce after a long absence; and (d) leave-or-see transitions, or changes whereby the individual makes the conscious decision to move to a new career.

In many ways, career transitions have become much more normative as the labour market requires a more fluid and dynamic employment pattern. There is now the expectation that workers will change jobs more frequently, and the image of "career changers" is also evolving. As Edwin Herr and his colleagues have pointed out, career changers previously were seen as having character or personality flaws that caused them difficulty in maintaining a position. They were often seen as malcontents or somehow lacking in the skills necessary to function in a given position. With increasing normalcy of career change, these perceptions are rapidly changing, and the process of career change is seen as an adaptive development stage. Recent studies on adult career changes indicate that the career change is intricately connected with the individual's psychological adjustment.

3. Factors related to career transition

A number of factors may contribute to an individual's ability (or inability) to adapt successfully to a given career transition. Schlossberg has asserted that the adaptation process may differ according to the type of transition as well as the individual's personal resources.

Based on the data collected, personal factors that can affect adjustment to transition include the *individual's values, self-efficacy, and emotional responses*. In addition, many adults engaged in midlife career transitions may have family responsibilities, such as *caring for children or partners*.

This added factor has the potential to serve as either support or barrier but will, regardless, have an effect on an individual's ability to adapt to a transition. Finally, *demographic and environmental factors* are important to consider in assessing how well adults may adjust to midlife career transitions.

4. Career anchors

A career anchor refers to an individual's self-perceived needs, values, and talents that shape career decisions. It can be thought of as a central component of self-concept that an employee is unwilling to relinquish, even when forced to make a difficult choice. The career anchor is significant because it influences career choices, affects decisions to move, shapes career desires, determines an individual's view of the future, and sways employee reactions to work experiences.

Measuring an individual's career anchors makes the career orientations of that individual explicit. From the data collected and based on the literature review, following career anchors were identified.

1. *Managerial competence* - individual employee pursues greater responsibility for accomplishing results through others.
2. *Technical competence* - employees focuses primarily on the exercise of technical expertise.
3. *Organizational security* - employees seeks company loyalty, tenure, and financial security.
4. *Geographic security* - individual employees links him or her to a particular area on a long-term basis.
5. *Autonomy* - employees seeks situations in which he or she will be free of organizational constraints and control.

6. *Identity* - employees has strong desire for status and prestige from belonging to certain organizations.
7. *Service* - employee dedicated to helping other people and contributing to causes.
8. *Variety* - employees desire a number of different tasks and challenges.

Discussion and Suggestions

Chi-square tests applied to quantitative data reveal that there is a statistically significant association between education status, designation and years of work experience (as independent variables) and career satisfaction (dependent variable). The themes identified from Qualitative data analysis dwell on individual values regarding career, relevance of work-life balance for women and the importance of Organizational support to realise career challenges and aspirations. Both data were collected using questionnaire. Hence it is important to facilitate career satisfaction at individual, organisational and corporate levels. The following suggestions are put forth:

1. During education, career counselling for individuals is given. However, career counselling for early career employees needs to be made available so that they can make judicious job moves.
2. Data reveal that education, designation and years of experience are significantly associated with career satisfaction. Hence organizations could focus on these factors.
3. Qualitative data indicates that women employees take career breaks for want of sufficient work-life balance initiatives. Hence, organisations could focus on the same.

4. At the national level, the ministry of HRD could make available e-resources to facilitate career satisfaction.

5. At the global level, the best practices of career satisfaction can be made known.

This study on career satisfaction has been carried out among women IT professionals in Kerala. Future research could focus on multi-variant studies with larger sample sizes. Also comparative studies (studies across nations or professions) may also be attempted.

Scope for Further Research

This study could be further carried ahead for the analysis of the differences in Career Satisfaction of the married women and unmarried women, which would dwell into the various familial and personal factors which interferes with career satisfaction. The scholars may search for the relationship between demographic characteristics and other traits such as emotional intelligence and resilience of employees and career satisfaction or career competencies. Social status, job tenure, and salary can be examined to be a better predictor of career satisfaction.

The study has not done an in-depth analysis of the types of facilitators and antecedents of career satisfaction. Hence, there is a need for further research to understand the dynamics of facilitators and antecedents on resilience, quality of life and life satisfaction of married women IT professionals. A comprehensive measurement of facilitators and antecedents might help to explain the rates of career satisfaction along with resilience, stress and life satisfaction.

Conclusion

In the current mobile and volatile job market, career transitions are more frequent than before. Several factors including personal and organizational factors lead to different career choices and career transitions and ultimately career satisfaction.

The present study provides several theoretical and practical implications for future research on career satisfaction. By examining career satisfaction issues in an Asian setting, our results may enhance our knowledge, as the majority of research has been conducted in the western context. This study indicated that it was important to promote gender sensitive social work research that will mainstream gender perspective in planning and execution of research in the field. It is necessary to incorporate methods that value and reflect the realities of women and adopt more gender sensitive and appropriate tools.

There was a need for more qualitative research that will capture the deeper meaning of the struggles of women related to mental health. The study indicated that there is a difference in the stress and coping mechanism of women professionals who have family support and those who do not. The study also revealed that there is a significant relationship between career satisfaction and number of children, career satisfaction and family size. It was also revealed that age does not have a significant relationship with career satisfaction. The job variables such as designation, number of job role changes and total years of work experience has a significant relationship with career satisfaction.

The study also indicated that there was a difference in terms of family support and career/family orientation among

respondents. Some of them emphasized more on being example to family and society on how to have a work-life balance along with successful career, while others stressed more on caretaker and service roles on family and regard job as only an identity, not something to be given more importance than family.

Research was carried out from a problem based perspective, and this study highlighted that despite of the levels of work-family conflict, and self-efficacy women were found to be resilient.

It is important to address career satisfaction at the micro (individual), meso (organizational) and macro (global) levels. This paper has not only traced the concept of 'career satisfaction' but also has showcased the linkages between career satisfaction and employee wellbeing and also has put forth suggestions and scope for further research. Further studies could be carried out to understand resilience and develop evidence based model for intervention

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