



Investigating the Gender Question in Career Advancement: Evidence from an Empirical Survey.

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Abstract: *The study intends to identify and observe the contrast in the factors influencing the career progress of men and women. The literature was reviewed using secondary means from scholarly databases like Google Scholars and Semantic Scholars. The trend in the past decade shows that rigorous work has been done to understand the workplace dynamics from the female perspective. Still, very few attempts provide insights into the perspective of their male counterparts. After identifying the research gap, primary data was collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The results shed light upon the changing career advancement narratives in modern times, and a gender-neutral perspective being the key to new development. The findings highlight the importance of context, perception, and methodology in understanding gender dynamics at work, calling for deeper, mixed-methods research to bridge the gap between perceived and structural realities and contribute strategically to enable organisations to adopt a collective and more inclusive approach to map career progress.*

KEYWORDS: *Career Advancement; Gender Study; Organisational Factors; Personal Factors; Social Factors;*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The workplace dynamics, diversity, inclusion and gender equality at all levels in a work setting have forevermore been a keen interest of researchers. Several articles and reports are eloquent about persistent gender differences in various aspects of employment, indicating the disadvantages, especially on the part of women.

The report on the Global Gender Gap (World Economic Forum, 2023) begins examining the issue from the entry-level, asserting extra difficulty faced by women despite actively seeking jobs and possessing an identical skill set to men and remaining subjected to inferior working conditions when aboard. The upsurge witnessed in the participation of women in the workforce is not enough to overlook the concentration of the population to perceived gender roles, domination of the majority over important roles and unequal split of power to advance to the top. A report (Where Women Work: Female-Dominated Occupations and Sectors - ILOSTAT, 2023) provide statistical evidence of gender-imbalanced employment across different sectors, suggesting that women are over-representation in caregiving occupations like education, nursing and healthcare, hospitality etc. Although the report suggests impressive progress made by women in the STEM industries, the pattern traces very limited progress to managerial and senior leadership roles. The study (Mousa, 2021) found that men in the interviews admitted to women being denied important administrative and leadership roles, despite being overrepresented in the middle and executive levels of the education sector.

At the onset of the growing idea of feminism and the demand for workplace equality, the evaluation of different factors that influence the career progress of both men and women is of vital importance. Apparently, the progress in one's career is concurrently affected by multiple domains, including the past experiences, present circumstances and future aspirations of an individual. Studies (Gangai & Agarwal, 2019;

Kodagoda & Jayawardhana, 2022) have organised factors affecting career advancement into organisational, socio-cultural, personal and psychological groups. A list of major barriers has been identified by (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Ramos et al., 2022) that hinder professional career choices, paths and the pace of progress.

However, it was found that while debating gender progress in work dynamics, most existing literature primarily focuses on women. Very few studies in the last decade have examined the position of their male counterparts and have attempted to understand the factors influencing their career advancement in similar work settings. Therefore, this study intends to learn the magnitude of impact the identified factors have on career development and bridge the gap in the literature by bringing out a contrast between men and women bearing the consequences of these factors in career advancement.

1.1 Rationale of the study:

This study reviews the past literature concerning the advancement in the professional domain and seeks to understand the factors that influence such progress. It offers awareness of the role of gender in a work dynamic and the influence the work environment has over gender. The study has attempted to go beyond the one-sided gender lens and parallelly understand the male perspective of progress.

This study has been careful not to undermine the challenges or problems faced by any gender or glorify the dominance of one over the other. It has adopted a neutral eye to understand both perspectives to report the arguments of existing literature and make suggestions vital for the progress of talent and the development of potential for higher positions, free from gender bias or stereotypes.

1.2 Objective of the study:

- ✓ To identify the factors that influence the career progress of men and women.
- ✓ To investigate the gender influence on career advancement
- ✓ To bring out the contrast in men and women concerning the influence of factors on their career advancement
- ✓ To examine the areas in the current practices that need reforms and suggest ways to improve an advancement mechanism free from gender bias that improves the organisation's value for human resources.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Career advancement is a subjective term meaning altogether the same to everyone yet different. The advancement in the professional domain may take various forms like additions in responsibilities, an increase in the span of work, an enhanced job title, learning a new skill set or a pay rise. The general idea of career advancement is moving forward to the next goal in your career, seeking an opportunity for growth, a higher position or more power. An individual seeking and achieving this progress is exposed to a work environment with several factors in function affecting the direction, path, and pace of such progress—the pay parity, access to such opportunities in the workplace, mentorship, training and development needs, personal priorities, cultural bondage, societal conditions are a few.

Organisational Factors:

Organisational support (Chauhan et al., 2022) and organisational policies (Nanaya, 2023) have a profound effect on perceived career success and aspirations for managerial positions. The studies highlight that while some organisation's practices encourage the progress of women up on the hierarchical ladder, others hinder the progress. (Gangai & Agarwal, 2019) points out the crucial role an organisation plays in creating a psychologically healthy work culture through fair and equitable distribution of quality assignments, psychological support through mentorship and providing advancement to leadership opportunities to all.

(Batool, 2020) discussed various forms of gender discrimination prevailing in the workplace, mainly women being on the receiving end. These discriminations were explained as a 'social phenomenon' affecting both the personal life and professional productivity of women negatively. However, the premise of women being the only victims when discussing gender discrimination was contradicted by (Lucifora & Vigani, 2016) stating that women as bosses may be effective in protecting fellow female colleagues, but have projected higher discriminatory behaviour among men. Despite the provisions laid out by law and policies by organisations, (Duffy et al., 2020) An investigation revealed the low level of men's uptake of paternity leaves, which affects men's attitude towards work, resulting from discontented work-life balance, and by extension leaves women to shoulder the major part of child-raising in early years.

The quality of assignments to women is mainly managerial and clerical, such as human resources, marketing or customer handling, saving the risky, important roles that affect the organisation's bottom line for men. (Ehsaei, 2024) revealed that women are prone to be caught in the loop with 'unpromotable work' or

spending time on assignments of no consequence in their career progress, compared to men. Along similar lines (Brescoll, 2013) writes about the entitlement men feel for flexible work schedules that enable them to focus on their career development, unlike women who are blocked out of the privilege due to psychological fear of backlash. In contradiction to this notion, (Padavic et al., 2020) say that organisations' effort to help women by allowing flexibility in work schedules and welfare policies often hurt their advancement prospects by exposing them to a no-boundary-to-work scheme.

Gender plays a role in accessing advancement opportunities too. Studies have revealed women as less opportune to international assignments (Bastida et al., 2021). The difference in priorities when seeking international assignments studied by (Dolce et al., 2021), revealed that extended separation from families was reported more by men who valued the presence of their significant other, whereas women were more inclined towards working out work-family management issues and welfare policies in place. The intangibles play an equally important role in enhancing one's chances of advancement. (Kroese, 2022) says 90% of the studies show the significant impact gender has on the work environment, training needs and outcomes of the learning.

Networking and sponsorships are important intangibles to progress up the career ladder. Men and women have different sets and qualities of networks that impact their career growth (Woehler et al., 2020) however, studies indicate the edge men have over women with early sponsorship and support networks (Fuhrmans, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020). Women, already juggling between domestic, personal and professional roles, face considerable disadvantages in their progress due to a lack of mentorship (Fitong Ketchiwou & Naong, 2023) and exclusion from informal networks (Chauhan & Mishra, 2021; Górska et al., 2022). Men and women have shown contrasting perceptions over the chase and handling of leadership positions at work, which is largely responsible for gender disparity in the top hierarchy of the organisation (Gino et al., 2015) can be viewed as an implication of differential advancement in careers.

Socio-Cultural Factors:

There is no denying the patriarchal hardships women have fought their way through to join the equality battle in the labour workforce. Women's careers have constantly been looked down upon due to the breadwinner dilemma and societal conditioning stemming from gender association of roles. However, with the change in times and growth in ambition, women have succeeded in paving their way (Shetty, 2018).

Family support (Au et al., 2021), family responsibility (Chauhan et al., 2022; Agrawal & Singh, 2022) and the juggling between work-life balance and gender expectations of the designated roles (Gangai & Agarwal, 2019) are key influential factors in the women's quest for career success. While (Gangai & Agarwal, 2019) debate their take on the negative impact, (Chauhan et al., 2022; Agrawal & Singh, 2022) establish them as positively important variance for influence. The social expectation to help women uplift in their careers falls on other women leaders through network-building support (Abalkhail, 2020), which often backfires when the 'queen bee' phenomenon kicks in, harming the chances of other women to progress instead.

However, (Padavic et al., 2020) deny the 'work-life' narrative, asserting that men also experience it and nevertheless advance in their careers. (de la Vega, 2022) (Stellner, 2021) further argues that men have benefited most from fatherhood, perceiving higher improvement as leaders than women, which (Stellner, 2022) attributes to gender empathy bias.

Personal Factors:

The progress in an individual's career is essentially a personal responsibility more than an organisational or social problem. While the studies eloquently indicate the gender advantage men receive over women in learning and growth, (Fitong Ketchiwou & Naong, 2023) present qualitative evidence for women being personally responsible for the lack of pace in their progress. The study reveals the need for women to actively indulge themselves in their career planning and chase progress consistent with their ambitions.

Several studies (Batoool, 2020; Gino et al., 2015; Tost et al., 2020) reflect on the psychological factors that hold them back from making due effort for skill development and pursuing professional aspirations, gender discrimination being one of the many problems. (Pazzanese, 2020) writes along the same lines about how women are less comfortable with self-promotion than men in seeking promotion or pay parity.

2.1 Research Gap

As noted earlier, the trend in the past decade shows rigorous work done to understand the female perspective of workplace dynamics, professional politics and challenges, with very few attempts to understand the perspective of their male counterparts.

Also, the studies have identified and produced evidence of various factors that affect an individual's career, with little information about the specifics on the magnitude of their influence on the pace of progress of men and women separately.

2.2 Hypothesis

H1: Gender does not influence career advancement.

(Alternative H1): Gender significantly (positive or negative) influences career advancement.

H2: There is no difference in the influence of organisational factors on the career advancement of men and women.

(Alternative H2): There is a significant difference in the influence of organisational factors on the career advancement of men and women.

H3: There is no difference in the influence of socio-cultural factors on the career advancement of men and women.

(Alternative H3): There is a significant difference in the influence of socio-cultural factors on the career advancement of men and women.

H4: There is no difference in the influence of personal factors on the career advancement of men and women.

(Alternative H4): There is a significant difference in the influence of personal factors on the career advancement of men and women.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review was conducted using the secondary form of research articles, review or perspective papers, books, and previous government reports from scholarly databases like Google Scholars and Semantic Scholars. Specific keywords, along with a combination of Boolean keywords and reference chains, were used to collect the highly influential and relevant articles for the study. The period of study ranged between 2014 and 2024.

To study the causes and implications of the gap, primary data was collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire that consisted of 20 questions in total, divided into two parts—demographic details of the respondent and subject area. The survey was followed by a telephonic open-ended interview with respondents. The universe of the study consisted of full-time employees and self-employed entrepreneurs across various industries. The sample responses were collected between April 2024 and June 2024. An MS Excel sheet was used for inclusion-exclusion criteria for the literature review, recording interview and questionnaire responses and running the data analysis.

The MS Excel was used for data analysis in a two-fold manner: Firstly, the average scores of factors influencing career advancement for males and females were calculated under three broad categories—organisational factors, socio-cultural factors and personal factors. Secondly, T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances was performed to test the hypothesis. The referencing of the paper was enabled using Mendeley referencing software. Original quotes from the interview have been used to conclude, although the identity was kept anonymous to protect the privacy of the respondents.

4. DATA FINDINGS:

4.1 Demographic Information of the Participants:

A total of 48 responses, consisting of an equal number of male and female participants from various sectors of employment and educational backgrounds, aged between 20-50+ years, were collected. The family orientation and level of employment of these participants were evenly distributed, enabling a better understanding of the role played by work and the non-work factors. Additionally, the demographic section of the questionnaire consisted of the marital status, work experience, and mode of current work (Work from home, office, or hybrid) of each participant for in-depth analysis of the recorded responses. Specifics are as follows:

- **Gender Orientation:** Respondents were evenly distributed—50% Males and 50% Females.
- **Age Orientation:** The majority of respondents (79.2%) were aged between 20-30 years, 12.5% from the age group between 30-40 years, leaving the rest ranging between 41-50 and 50+ years.
- **Family Orientation:** Out of the total respondents, 41.7% belonged to a Joint Family and 58.3% to a Nuclear Family.
- **Level of Employment:** The respondents were spread across various levels of employment, such as: Senior Management (12.5%); executive or Middle Level (37.5%); Operational or Entry Level (29.2%); Independent or Self-Employed (20.8%).

4.2 Calculation of Average Scores of Males and Females across the factors:

Table 1: Average scores for males and females across the three factors.

Gender	Organisational	Socio-Cultural	Perosnal
Female	3.5416	3.3303	3.4583
Male	3.6488	3.1398	3.6607
Grand Total	3.5952	3.2351	3.5595

Source: Data Analysis Report generated from MS Excel Worksheet.

Interpretation:

The above table (**Table 1**) shows a visible difference between the average scores of males and females across the three factors:

- Organisational Factors:
 - Females score slightly higher as compared to males (3.65 vs 3.54).
- Socio-Cultural Factors:
 - Males score higher as compared to females (3.33 vs 3.14), suggesting that females feel more negatively impacted by socio-cultural factors.
 - The open-ended answers from females in this regard attributed this negative feeling to stem from the deep-rooted patriarchy in the social system.
- Personal Factors:
 - Females score higher compared to males (3.66 vs 3.46).

Therefore, the differences in the average scores contradict the null hypothesis (H1), suggesting that gender, in fact, does play a role in shaping the career advancement experiences for males and females. However, in order to conclude with certainty, we must test other hypotheses from the T-Test Results ahead.

4.3 Calculation of T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

Table 2: T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	ORGANISATIONAL		SOCIO-CULTURAL		PERSONAL	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Mean	3.648809524	3.5416667	3.139881	3.330357	3.660714	3.458333
Variance	0.289670216	0.3983658	0.184773	0.445791	0.425577	0.496857
Observations	24	24	24	24	24	24
Hypothesised Mean Difference	0		0		0	
Df	45		39		46	
t Stat	0.632795288		-1.17512		1.032304	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.265034994		0.123536		0.153663	
t Critical one-tail	1.679427393		1.684875		1.67866	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.530069988		0.247072		0.307327	
t Critical two-tail	2.014103389		2.022691		2.012896	

Source: Data Analysis Report generated from MS Excel Worksheet.

Interpretation:

4.3.1 Organisational Factors:

Although some differences were observed in the mean values of males (3.65) and females (3.54), according to the independent samples t-test, $p = 0.530$, which indicates no statistically significant difference at 0.05, suggesting that there is no difference in the perception of organisational factors affecting careers between males and females.

4.3.2 Socio-Cultural Factors:

Although females scored slightly higher (3.33) indicating more influence than males (3.14) in the mean values, according to the independent samples t-test, $p = 0.247$, which indicates no statistically significant difference at 0.05, suggest that there is no difference in the influence by socio-cultural factors on careers advancement of both males and females.

4.3.3 Personal Factors:

There is no statistically significant difference observed in how males and females perceive personal and psychological factors influencing their career, as, despite the slight difference in mean values of males (3.66) and females (3.46), $p=3.307$ according to the independent samples t-test is insignificant at 0.05.

Table 3: T-Test inference table.

Factors	p-Value (two-tailed)	Significance at 0.05	Conclusion
Organisational	0.5301	NO	Fail to reject H2
Socio-cultural	0.2471	NO	Fail to reject H3
Personal	0.3073	NO	Fail to reject H4
Source: Author			

Therefore, while the slight difference in the mean scores do exist, they are not found statistically significant (**Table 3**), suggesting that within the limitations of this sample, that the study fails to reject the null hypotheses (H1 through H4), implying that gender does not influence the key factors affecting career progression of both males and females. Alternatively, it is safe to infer that in the studied population, the organisational, socio-cultural and personal experiences of men and women are very similar in their professional journeys today.

5. DISCUSSION

Contradiction Between Literature & Empirical Findings

The extensive body of literature consists of numerous studies highlighting the role of gender in shaping an individual's career advancement experience, especially the trajectories of women's professional journey. Previous research has consistently and strongly suggested various perspectives on how gender-based disparities persist, marking key differences in the access of career-enhancing resources such as mentorship, sponsorship, assignment qualities and networking for men as compared to women. Studies have also explained, with empirical evidence, the disproportionate impact of socio-cultural pressures, organisation's structural and operational biases and psychological barriers on both genders, making the findings of this study a notable contradiction.

Despite the visible difference observed in average scores, the t-test results confirmed that the gender-based influence of organisational, socio-cultural, personal and psychological differences in the present sample of 48 professionals, equally divided by gender, were not statistically meaningful at the 0.05 level for career advancement.

This contradiction, therefore, opens a room for a careful interpretation that offers alternative explanations. Some of them are discussed below:

- **Sample Demographics:** With the majority of respondents belonging to the younger age bracket (20-30 years), it may be possible that workplace experiences and perceived gender equality questions may be different as compared to the perceptions of the older cohorts. It is possible that with the change of generation, the perspectives have experienced a shift that reflects a more evolved and inclusive work environment, suggesting that overt gender disparities are less pronounced today than in the past.
- **General Practices:** While the data in this study is largely self-reported perceptions, it is possible that the subtle gender bias mechanisms deeply rooted in structural realities and systems of the organisations (as indicated in the literature) may go unnoticed or pass as normalised experience for both men and women. Such generalised practices may go unreported in structured surveys.

- Depth of Information: The Likert scale responses are known for the limitation that they may not capture the depth of complexity, especially for the intangible factors and experiences such as exclusion from informal networks and explicit bias. For these subtleties to better surface, more thorough qualitative methods are needed to be used such as focus groups or personal interviews.
- Contextual Generalisability: Diverse organisational cultures, work environment, and varying work ethics of professionals largely influence the nature of self-reported experiences, limiting the observable data disparities.

While the study contradicts the strong link asserted by the literature between gender and career advancement, deep-diving into alternative interpretations suggests that such perception is subject to work contexts, age groups and may not be uniformly shared among people working in diverse work cultures. The contradiction opens up a dialogue on how gender questions are evolving in professional contexts. It also begs an inquisitive inquiry about whether it is shifting towards subtler forms, truly diminishing as the organisational policies aimed to, or simply evading the quantitative detection.

To reconcile the gap between the practical quantitative findings and theoretical evidence, it is recommended that future research should expand the sample size and employ qualitative data to capture nuances, more in-depth realities of emotional experiences that are otherwise missed by the structured surveys. Exploring intersectional factors such as caste, location of work or habitation or socio-economic growth that address gender questions in context with the career progression will help validate the generalisability of the newly evolving gender-neutral narratives and findings. There is room for more work on understanding the male perception of progress, in addition to the perspectives of other genders and comparative gender studies, to explore the realms of career advancements in the future. While this study focused on observing the contrast between men and women only, the equity, liberalisation and inclusion concerning holistic career advancement must expand the scope to also include LGBTQIA+.

6. CONCLUSION

To fulfil the main objective of this study—examination of the extent to which gender influences career advancement of men and women, a sample, equally representing male and female participants with diversity in demographic characteristics, was collected from professionals employed across various sectors. While initial descriptive analysis suggested a slight difference in average scores of male and female respondents in organisational, socio-cultural and personal factor domains, the independent sample t-test results revealed no statistical significance of the difference in any of the three categories. The p-values remained well above the 0.05 significance level for all three categories—organisational, socio-cultural, personal and psychological factors affecting career advancement of males and females, suggesting the variations were not statistically meaningful.

However, in hindsight, the findings of this study must not be interpreted as a denial of systematic bias and structural disparities regarding gender in the broader workforce. The divergence may simply indicate an evolving and more inclusive mindset shift with generations. Alternatively, the contradiction observed between quantitative findings of this study with extensive theoretical evidence from previous research opens the room for dialogue and deep thinking upon the need for methods, samples and means of research that allow qualitative insights to capture nuanced gender-based experiences that structured quantitative methods may have overlooked.

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