Towards Career Sustainability: Issues of Women in India

[1] Anjali Desai*, [2] Rajita Singh, [3] Sudhanshu Bhatt

[1] [2] [3] XLRI, Xaviers Institute of Management, Jamshedpur, India.
Corresponding Author Email: [1] r18002@astra.xlri.ac.in

Abstract— This paper seeks to discuss what makes a sustainable career for a woman in India, how social structures can limit sustainable careers and how the process of socialisation and internalization of social role expectations impact career sustainability. It seeks to highlight ways in which women could have sustainable careers, also called professional growth. This study is based on secondary sources of data collated from a host of research papers and literature published on the subject.

India's statistics on gender equity reflect stark biases. The country's female labour force participation (LFPR) rate is less than half the world average; Indian women earn only about 65% of what their male counterparts earn (compared to 77% world average). Only a minute fraction of listed companies has women leaders. What creates this skew? What factors influence how careers are shaped and sustained?

Using data and findings from diverse sources, including seven India-specific papers, we explore the concept of career sustainability as it relates to Indian women. We examine the effect of social structures such as the primary family unit and the organisation as a gendered construct. We argue that these and other social structures, coupled with women's internalization of their social role expectations are factors that directly impact the sustainability of women's careers. Finally, we identify initiatives that can build positive social identities and can mitigate the gendered nature of organizations and society at large.

Keywords:-- Career sustainability, gender equity, gendered organizations, gender identity, gender roles and self-concept.

I. INTRODUCTION

There's only one way to get to the top of a ladder, but there are many ways to get to the top of a jungle gym. ... a jungle gym provides views for many people, not just those at the top. On a ladder, most climbers are stuck staring at the butt of the person above.

> — *Sheryl Sandberg, Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*

Career advancement of women is the result of an interaction between the context in which she operates and her position within it. Studying women's career advancement involves understanding the maze that most women need to navigate and how they do it as they seek to build careers. A multifaceted mix of objective experiences and individual assessments shape a career. This results in a wide-ranging assortment of how careers are formed – including needs, constraints, challenges, and dilemmas - and involves a critical play of individual reflections concerning career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018; Karelaia & Guillén, 2014).

Sustainable careers are portrayed by reciprocally beneficial outcomes for the individual and the environment. The unpredictable and swiftly changing global economic environment in which careers have unfolded and continue to do so has made sustainable careers a significant challenge for individuals, organizations, and societies (Lawrence et al., 2015). For women in India the story is no different. However, the India story is unique in that gender parity has not gone hand-in-hand with economic growth and improved education. India's statistics on gender equity reflect stark biases putting

a question mark on women's career aspirations.

In India, the relationship between women and the labour market has been a complex one. For decades, women's workforce participation has remained a matter of concern for all – from families to policy makers, and of course organizations. Yet, women's labour force participation rate in the country has, at best, been inconsistent and is in dissonance with the dominant narrative which seeks to portray the emergence of the country's knowledge economy as a great social leveller, agnostic of class, caste or gender (Vijayakumar, 2013).

Barring the immediate past, India's economy has been growing at globally competitive rates for decades. Yet, India's women seem to be dropping out of its workforce at an alarming rate. The country's female LFPR had dropped to 21.2% in March 2021 (Catalyst research, The PLFS Quarterly Report), a fall of more than two percentage points from the 2018 figure of 23.6% for Indian women aged 15 and above (strategy-business.com, May 2020) while Indian men notched up 78.6% during the same period. During the same period, the female unemployment rate increased to 11.8% in 2021 from 10.6% the year before. Rural women are exiting the workforce at a faster rate than urban women. Indian women make only 65.5% of what Indian men take home in pay (Catalyst research). Only 3.6% of companies listed on the National Stock Index had woman CEOs and Managing Directors (Deloitte Global's Women in the Boardroom report, 2022). Finally, only 14% of India's elected parliamentarians are women, and this is a record high (The Statesman, 2021).

The report in strategy-business.com (May 2020) suggested that increasing women's labour force participation by 10

percentage points could add $770 billion to India's GDP by 2025. If the above holds, gender parity is likely to have far-reaching socio-economic consequences for India. Yet, at a policy level there has been little or insignificant efforts at course correction, and even lesser action to change social constructs.

Research has shown that majority of working Indian women struggle to attain work-life balance (Padmanabhan & Sampath Kumar, 2016). Having to manage daily requirements of the family along with responsibilities at work can be overwhelming, more so in the absence of any enabling policy at the workplace. If organizations enable work-life balance and take care of their women employees, it will not only result in higher retention of employees but also make them highly productive. What has made the situation even more difficult for women are repeated attempts to normalize anti-women politics. There have been numerous instances where women have been at the receiving end of misogynistic comments or acts by political leaders reinforcing the social construct that the home is a woman's natural domain, effectively negating her participation in socio-economic progress. Contextual elements like family support, social acceptance, supervisor support, etc., act as determinants of career aspirations (Kang and Kaur, 2020). Women who recognize convenience of support from persons at home and work aim to progress in their careers while others are disincentivized from aspiring for growth. As it is, women remain vulnerable to a whole host of issues and bear the brunt of every shock which overshadow career paths. Sudden shocks like the recent Covid pandemic tend to first push women out of the job market. Men who have been displaced from urban jobs due to the economic slowdown have in turn displaced rural women on agriculture farms.

At another level, the entry of working women into higher managerial positions remains restricted. Clearly, the glass ceiling effect (GCE) remains pervasive (De and Chatterjee, 2017). While career aspirations of women have steadily evolved over several past decades, only a few have today made the cut to the senior management level. Moreover, women are found in corner rooms in only a few sectors, indicating that the glass ceiling is firmly in place for most. Breaking the glass ceiling would require the participation of women in all fields and at all levels without discrimination.

Research Questions:

Why does India display such a dismal scenario for working women? What causes Indian women to drop out of the workforce, or not go high enough, or not join at all? In this paper, we examine the meanings of sustainable careers – how we should define sustainability and aspiration when it comes to careers, and how this might work for Indian women.

What are the indicators of sustainability in a career? Are there any theoretical constructs underpinning the indicators of career sustainability? How do societal mores, the internalisation of role expectations, contextual support from spouses and close family, and organizational policies,

cultures, unwritten codes and frameworks influence women's careers? What roles do government and the media play? Are both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors involved? Can positive role models, or a sense of positive gender and leader identity help women navigate careers more smoothly?

We examine these and other questions through a review of several India-specific studies that have examined the factors influencing the progress of women's careers. Finally, we conclude by discussing some mechanisms that might help to positively impact career sustainability, through women's own agency, and through societal and organizational mores and structures.

Theoretical Grounding

Multiple factors and changes that take place over time affect career sustainability (*Cardador, 2017; Cooper et al., 2020*). What makes a career sustainable? 3 critical dimensions typically analyzed: the person, context and time. Multiple factors affect career sustainability and account has to be taken of how changes that take place over time affect career sustainability. Three indicators, health, happiness and productivity - essential to an individual's prosperity and form the main building blocks for the welfare of one's family, peers, the organization where one works and the society as a whole. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory also illustrates that resources gain and loss processes over time impact one's career sustainability (*Hobfoll 1998*). Stress, resources, resilience, crossover, burnout, engagement are all different resources that affect the individual and in case of women, as the course of their lives change, these resources and the gains and losses therein impact their career sustainability. Self Determination Theory (SDT) examines in detail aspects that protect and enhance career sustainability, by portraying proactive behavior and individual growth (*Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. 1985*) while striving to fulfill innate psychological needs, i.e., the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Materials and Methods

The current study is based on secondary sources of data collated from a host of research papers (included in References) and literature published on the subject across the world. Trends that have emerged, as reflected in the articles published over the past 10 years and a few other papers that were considered relevant and important, in the period between 2007 and 2021, were captured and studied.

A thorough and methodical EBSCO search process was conducted on November 26, 2021, at 20:13 hours for identifying the articles to be studied for the purpose of this paper. The keywords used in the search included: Career Issues, Job issues, Challenges, Female, Women, Organization, Corporate, Workplace, Performance, Advancement, Women careers, Sustainable careers, Sustainable careers and women. Initial search results threw up 1,080,296 articles. Filters were then applied to narrow down the search which included: SU within subjects,

scholarly (peer reviewed) journals which then narrowed down the number of articles to 554,656; a time frame of 2010-2021 brought down the number of articles to 356,097; then by focusing on only academic journals the number came to 337,675. Within this, the author then focused only on A* and A journals which brought the article count to 232. The abstracts of these 232 articles were scanned to find out and narrow down the number of articles to be thoroughly read and studied to 23 relevant ones for the purpose of this assignment.

The collated data on India was then further segregated based on Context (socio-economic status and profession), Career Issue; Factors Influencing Career Development / Sustainability (as relevant) and what these Specific issues were. Examples as mapped from a few of the studies are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table : 1

Context		Career Issue	Factors Influencing Career Development / Sustainability	Specifics
Socio-economic Status	Profession		Personal	Family/children
Urban/Rural	Private Bank	Aspirations	Social	Marriage/Patriarchy
			Organizational	Supervisor support

Collation of data and analysis was based on the number of times each factor was found mentioned across studies and have been done across: (i) personal factors; (ii) social factors and (iii) organizational factors. Figure 1 is a sample of the data collated.

Figure 1: Personal Factors Influencing Women's Careers in India

The observations and findings from the papers under review, in tabular form, are presented in Annexure-1 to highlight the major findings which helped the author to derive inferences about issues inhibiting sustainable careers for women in India.

Table 3: Annexure

Context			Career Issue	Factors Influencing Career Dev	Specifics	Year of Study
Country	Socio-economic Status	Profession				
India	Small town/rural	BPO	Aspirations	Personal Social	Family/children Marriage/Patriarchy	2013
India	Urban	ICT	Career Growth	Social	Marriage/Patriarchy	2016
India	Urban / Rural	Private bank	Career Sustainability	Personal Social Organisational	Family/children Marriage/Patriarchy Supervisor support	2020
India	Rural / Semi-Urban		Career Sustainability	Personal Social	Family/children Marriage/Patriarchy	2017
India	Urban	Medical Professionals	Career Sustainability	Personal Social Organisational	Family, Parenting Patriarchy Insecurity of men, sexual harassment, glass ceiling effect	2017
India	Urban / Semi-urban	Banking and Insurance	Career Sustainability	Personal Social Organisational	Personal Cognitive factors Family, work life balance Discrimination	2020
India	Urban	Managerial	Career Aspirations	Personal Social Organisational	Career goals Patriarchy Flexible working hours, promotion policies	2019

II. DISCUSSION

In 2017, India was one of the world's fastest growing large economies, growing annually at 7%+. However, this growth was achieved with half of its population – women – increasingly absent from its workforce. India's female labour force participation rate – the percentage of women (aged 15-years+) engaged in its workforce, having reached its highest point of around 32% in 2005, declined sharply to around 20% in 2017 (data from World Bank and the International Labour Organization). This means that year, only a-fifth of the women eligible to work in India, were really working. The following years saw no noticeable recovery. On the contrary, the Covid pandemic of 2020 through now appears to have deepened the crisis with women having to make way for men across various segments of the labour market (strategybusiness.com, 2020, 2021).

Not only is the number of women in the work force dwindling, but women are also almost invisible in the higher levels of an organization's hierarchy. Despite legislation, women held only 17% of board seats in 2022, this after a sharp 8.6% rise between 2012 and 2022 (Financial Express, Deloitte Global's Women in the Boardroom report, 2022). In a study of women in leadership positions in academic dentistry in India (Shobha Tandon, Anil Kohli, and Sumati Bhalla, 2007), it was found that of the 205 dental colleges in India, only 20 (less than 10%) had female deans. This is while 30% of the students were women.

What causes so many women in India to drop out of the workforce? Why are there so few women in leadership roles in corporate organizations? There are many diverse reasons to explain why careers for women in India are not sustainable, even for those engaged in formal employment. But before we discuss what Indian women aspire to in their careers, what makes their careers and factors that impact career sustainability, let us define career and career sustainability.

A career is defined as a series of related work experiences of an individual within an organization or in different organizations. Having a career implies that there is some sort of a continuous or semi-continuous progress over time through increasing levels of learning, responsibility and wages, either within an organisation or across several organizations in usually related industries. Therefore, a career can be studied through the dimensions of person, time and social/ organizational context.

Not all such sequences of work experiences are equally predictable or sustainable as there are many factors that influence career sustainability during the course of the course of one's performing life. Agreeing to Van der Heijden et al., 2015, sustainable occupations relate to "progressions of career events manifested throughout a range of patterns of connection over time, in that way intersecting numerous social spaces, exemplified by personal agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual". Careers can be sustainable only if its pursuit is equally beneficial to the person, the company and the social environment throughout time. For instance, the decision to accept a promotion might be beneficial to both parties in the short term, but the true indicator of such a promotion being a contributor to a sustainable career comes over the long term – that is, around the need to be a robust individual-profession fit over time. The promotion is truly sustainable if it does not lead to stress, fatigue or increased unrest in the home environment. We argue that the challenge of sustainable careers for women involves further than discrete career management and certainly necessitates the dynamic participation of all stakeholders, for instance the woman's household members and supervisor(s), peers, employer, the academic system, policy makers, regulators, and culture at large.

However, this needs to be seen from the prism of women's aspirations about their careers. Conventionally, research and data on careers of men, their challenges, and aspirations, were supposed to fit women as well. Yet, men and women have dramatically different views on their careers, family roles and meaning of success. More recent literature supports the view that women's careers or work lives cannot be understood without a simultaneous look into their non-work or family lives (Powell & Mainiero, 1992). Women's career paths are visualized as moving along the two banks of a river - one side emphasizing on relationships and the other focusing on career. At any point in the continuum, a woman may trade off relationships at the cost of career success or growth. She may also strive to attain a balance between the two. What this implies is that personal factors greatly influence women's careers. They face career interruptions due to parenting demands or dual-career parenting. Of course, personal variables such as an individual's behaviours and associated traits, including aspirations and planning of career, are recognized as shaping career advancement and / or sustainability.

In India in particular, where societal expectations of women centre around their nurturing role in the home, career aspirations for women are often seen to be subordinate to their family commitments. A study of women workers of a rural BPO unit outside Bangalore (Gowri Vijaykumar, 2013) found that young female BPO workers in this setting did not conform to their supervisors' expectation of individualised work aspirations. Instead, their aspirations were "flexible", drawing on both how they thought their future careers would look and societal expectations of their future roles as wives and mothers. Men in the same study were more sure-footed and made long term plans for their future. Women's aspirations tended to shuttle between the two poles of continuing their careers in the IT industry and an ideal of middle-class domesticity rooted in the family (See Figure 1 above). There is statistical evidence to indicate that the challenges of work-life balance impact even women who have clarity on career goals (Padmanabhan & Sampath Kumar, 2016). It has also been noted that women manage their career growth and family while compromising on self. One reason for this would be the absence of enablers of work-life balance in most workplaces. Thus, definitions that women apply to career sustainability may be different from simply meaning continued career progression.

Following Van der Heijden et al., (2015), the three characteristics that we use to indicate the sustainability of a career are health, happiness, and productivity:

Health includes both physical and mental health. A career often makes heavy physical demands on the individual, especially in areas such as manufacturing. In Indian cities, long and stressful commutes often place high demands on individuals and impact physical (and mental) well-being. While the effects of such stress may remain hidden in the early years of one's career, they become increasingly visible over time, as the individual's ability to deal with physically stressful work reduces. This is also true for mental health. The effects of stress and continual anxiety often become apparent only after many years, especially if the causes have been left unaddressed. At that point, individuals often experience burnout, with one possible consequence being that they drop out of their careers.

Happiness is the feeling of being fulfilled or productive with one's career, as seen in the context of one's broader life. It is a subjective measure and is dependent on the dynamic fit of one's career with one's interests, values, life goals, need for self-expression or personal growth.

Productivity means both a strong performance in one's current job as well as high employability and career potential. The indicators of productivity also change over the course of a career – at the beginning of careers, high productivity follows from the individual's ability to master the skills needed to perform specific tasks. Over time, however, adaptability, the ability to learn and unlearn quickly and the ability to deal with co-workers and other stakeholders are better indicators than pure skill level at specific tasks.

Factors influencing career sustainability

Research has explored this question from multiple angles – how individual characteristics impact career advancement, the impact of the work environment, co-workers, managers/ supervisors, organizational policies, societal norms and family support or the lack of it. Sheryl Sandberg's famous dictum to "lean in" asks women to adopt a more proactive approach and places responsibility of success on individual women rather than on societal and organizational structures around them. Since then, there has been vocal opposition to this individualistic approach (most notably by Michelle Obama) and widespread recognition that merely working hard and putting their hands up for more responsibility are no guarantee of productive, happy and healthy careers for women.

In the Indian context, research has centered on personal, organizational and societal, involving familial factors that influence women's career aspirations and sustainability. Within this, personal factors seem to weigh in more than the others, as seen in Table 2. In the largely traditional and patriarchal society that is India, gender stereotyping, gender prejudice at the work, family obligations and expectations and family-work conflicts are all important influencing factors.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Career Sustainability in India

Personal	41.18%
Social	35.29%
Organizational	23.53%

Another noteworthy factor is gendered career patterns and inverted role hierarchy in technical firms which stems from the belief that women only are capable of certain kinds of roles, further validating the stereotyping of women (Cardador, 2017). Also, changes that take place over time affect a woman's career sustainability (Cooper et al., 2020). For example, external shocks such as the Covid has forced global markets to accommodate wide-spread flexible working and work-from-home for both genders which may have a long-term impact on working hours and patterns. It is most likely to also have an impact on women's careers, some being forced to drop out of the workforce. With the entire family working or studying from home, empirical evidence has shown that a woman's family duties have multiplied post the pandemic.

In this paper, we examine how the process of socialisation and internalisation of social role expectations affects health, happiness and performance. We also look at the effect of social structures: the primary family unit, spousal support, organizational systems and narratives about women in society at large.

Gender roles and self-concept: Research shows that as children grow into adulthood, exposure to societal mores, media messaging, and gendered expectations impact young men and women differently. The messages young girls receive from the media centre around appearance and sexual appeal. In many cultures, phrases such as "like a girl" suggest that executing somewhat like a girl is unproductive or incompetent. Women with fruitful careers are regularly portrayed as cruel, vindictive or sexual predators, or being as ineffective mothers (Tammy D Allen et al., 2016). These sorts of signals erode the confidence of young women and set expectations for what their future roles in society should be.
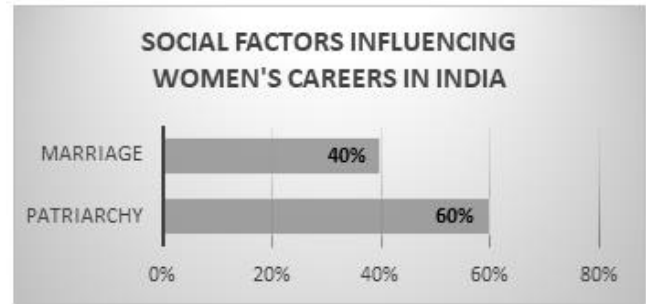

Figure 2: Social Factors

Women also seem to be less willing to compete. Research shows that across all age groups, men score higher on willingness to compete. Women's competitive drive may be reduced by their consideration of how their family life and possibility of having children will fit in with their work life, a consideration that counts less when men make career decisions. As an example of how this works in the Indian context, a study of women in leadership positions in academic dentistry in India found that 75% of respondents confessed that at some point in their lives they had been taught that women should be shy and submissive and should downplay their contribution to society and the family (Shobha Tandon, Anil Kohli and Sumati Bhalla, 2007).

There has also been research about women's conflict between gender and leader identities. Identity is a set of meanings that individuals attach to themselves. A positive identity evaluation implies that individuals are comfortable being who they are ("I am glad I am a woman") and that they perceive others look on that identity favourably ("Others respect women"). Research has also shown that women experience some conflict between their gender identities and leader identities (Natalia Karelaia, Laura Guillen, 2014). Gender role stereotypes describe leaders as being assertive, competitive, and problem-solving, while the characteristics ascribed to women are warm, nurturing, co-operative etc. This can engender an identity conflict, leading to anxiety and stress.

Spousal Support: Concomitant with women's own expectations and internalisation of their social role and their perception of social and gender identity are factors such as spousal and other close family support, family commitments and the inordinate pressure to perform household duties singlehandedly. These social pressures tend to be more telling in highly patriarchal societies like India. In the study of women in academic dentistry cited earlier, more than 60% of respondents said that they felt their family commitments

kept them from advancing in their careers, and more than 57% said that they didn't get any help from their spouse on domestic chores. Another 62% said that spouses didn't help with childcare either.

In fact, spousal support could be the most important factor impacting women's careers. Spousal support, however, goes beyond sharing childcare duties and domestic chores. Lakhwinder Singh Kang and Gurpreet Kaur (2020) conducted a study of females in the financial segment in main towns of Punjab in India. One of the key findings in this study was that proactive, positive spousal support had a great positive effect on women's career aspirations. Essentially, when spouses encouraged women in their careers, women aspired for more in their careers. Using Structural Equation Modelling techniques, the study aimed to understand the impact of Spousal Support, Perceived Supervisory Support, Perceived Collegial Support and Perceived Organizational Support on women's career aspirations. The study found that of these factors, Support from Spouse was the most important in predicting career aspirations. Spousal support indicated that women believed that when their spouses thought their careers were important and took time to listen to them talk about their work, women felt that their careers were important and they themselves were valued. In addition, since their organizations lacked mechanisms through which they could get feedback and encouragement from male colleagues, their husbands' opinions frequently gave them a trusted male point of view.

The fact that women in India own the lion's share of responsibility for both housework and care work (both of children and the elderly) also makes it physically difficult to pursue advancement in paid work outside the house. Not only do spouses provide minimal support, but prevalent social mores also ensure that cooking, cleaning, childcare, elder-care and most things connected with the home are assumed to be the woman's responsibility and very frequently, she has no one to share these chores with. The sheer physical stress of undertaking the equivalent of two or three full-time jobs forces many women to cut their careers short and focus completely on the home.

Organizational factors: The third set of factors that impact women's career sustainability centres around the organization. As the framework within which women (and men) live out their work lives, the culture, metrics, enshrined values, institutional safeguards and norms within organizations have significant influence over women's careers. Substantial numbers of women in the workplace are a relatively recent phenomenon – less than a hundred years old in most countries and even less in countries like India. The percentage of women in many types of occupations, manufacturing for example, tends to be quite low even today. To begin with then, women tended to be an exotic species in the workplace. While that may have reduced over time, the fact remains that the organization is often a gendered construct.

One consequence of this is the "pet to threat" status of women. As women progress through their careers, their perception within the organization may change. As they enter the workplace, many women experience the pet situation – they are welcomed, even protected, and their every step in the organizational environment is guided by seemingly benevolent hands. As they go forward and begin to take leadership positions, they question the status-quo and might be identified as a menace. This may result in anxiety within existing leaders and some may challenge or seek to subvert these women who are new entrants.

Another consequence of gendered organizations is that the mentorship that women receive tends to be different from that offered to men. In a paper titled 'Why men still get more promotions than women' (Harvard Business Review, 2010), Christine Silva, Nancy Carter, Herminia Ibarra and have discussed how women have a tendency to be under-supported and all around-mentored. Women tend to get feedback and advice and nominated for task forces and "extra credit" work, while losing out on sponsorship. Men report how their mentors actively plan their careers with them, endorse them in public, and provide concrete help when they take on new roles. In contrast, the mentorship that women receive tends to be arms-length.

In India, where most mentors of even women in relatively senior positions are men, social considerations make the relationship even more distant. Both parties might be concerned about whether such a work relationship might be perceived as too close, and so no rapport is even established.

The study of women in finance in Punjab, India, cited earlier, found that perceived supervisory support in the organization was an important factor impacting women's careers. Constructive feedback and advice from supervisors helped women add to their capabilities and furthered their career progression. Women agreed that when supervisors assigned them to challenging projects, they felt an increase in confidence and were more prepared to take on senior roles. These assignments improved their visibility within the organization as well, thus increasing their chances of promotion.
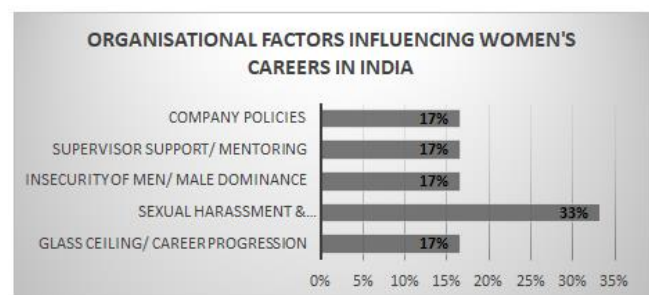

Figure 3: Organizational Factors

Researchers have found that once a woman has been appointed to a managerial spot, the prospects of a another woman being appointed to an executive position drop by 50%. The #MeToo Movement also seems to have had some

unintended consequences. Research at the University of Houston has found that one-on-one interactions have reduced, with mentoring and socializing affected. A study has found that 21% of men and 12% of women said they were reluctant to hire women for jobs that require close interaction with men.

Towards Sustainability

Organizations, society, government, the media, and individual men and women all have a role to play in breaking down the barriers that obstruct women from having careers that foster health, happiness and productivity.

What organizations can do: Organizations can begin at the top and voluntarily set minimum standards for diversity in the boardroom and in senior management. As women become more visible at the top levels of organizations, it becomes easier for women starting careers or in the middle rungs to have role models to aspire to and learn from. Greater diversity in the boardroom and at executive level also increases the chances of more gender positive policies being put in place, greater sponsorship for women and more advocacy of women within the workplace. Putting in place policies such as mandatory paternity leave sends clear signals about the organization's commitment to ensure the overall well-being of the workforce, irrespective of gender. Similarly, crafting mentoring policies that work as well for women as they do for men will help women overcome the sponsorship gap and settle into more responsible roles. Organizations can also enshrine flexible work methods within their policy framework – since the burden of homecare falls disproportionately on women, flexible policies can help women plan work and home duties more appropriately. Organizations should also pay attention to informal signals such as the tolerance for humour that demeans women, or the tendency to seek out women for any role that has a "nurturing" element.

Role of individuals: As individuals, women need to be vocal about their needs and the choices imposed on them both within the workplace and in the home. At home, proactively having discussions about the volume of housework and how it should be shared is the first step to releasing the burden of housework that so many women labour under. At work, seeking sponsorship, countering biased evaluations by providing quantifiable information, being vocal about incidents that are unfair to one gender are some ways to engage and push the organization towards better outcomes. Men need to be mindful of their choices – imposing certain kinds of roles on women, excluding women from informal networks, participating in "harmless" jokes at the expense of female colleagues – these are activities that can add up to highly toxic environments for women, and can only be controlled if men refuse to participate and call out colleagues who are responsible.

Other mechanisms: There is a larger role that individual men and women, organizations, the media and government, all have to play: active advocacy, rejecting the media's

traditional portrayals of women, actively promoting women role models. Greater participation of women in law-making is directly linked to gender equity. Norway, Sweden and Denmark, three countries at the leading spots of the 'gender equity index', pioneered voluntary gender quotas into governmental representative ranks in the 1970s. Today, parliament of Sweden, for example, has about 44% female representation. These are also countries, incidentally that are near the top of the Global Economic Competitiveness Index, proving that gender equitable policies also make for good economics.

Finally, indoctrination starts early – young boys and girls receive, process and act on gendered messaging from early in their lives. Active parenting that teaches children to question stereotypes, challenges assumptions and points out positive role models is key to the development of young adults that will look at the world through an ungendered lens.

III. CONCLUSION

Through this paper, we have discussed the issue of career sustainability especially as it applies to women in India – how it is defined, how sustainability is characterised, and what indicators we can use to identify sustainable careers.

We also examined the complex set of factors that impact career aspirations and sustainability. Key roles are played by individuals themselves, the primary family unit, organizations within which these individuals work and their interpersonal relationships with spouses, colleagues, supervisors, mentors, and close family members. Women's gender and work identities and their intrapersonal relationships – their internalization of social mores, their expectations of themselves in their roles as workers, wives, mothers and women, are all crucial factors. Organizations, as the place where many of these relationships play out, and as structured entities with their own cultures, policies, rules – written and unwritten, hierarchies and traditions, serve as a vehicle both of women's career aspirations and of social role expectations.

Finally, we explored some mechanisms that can help create a more equitable world – through the actions of individual men and women, through organizations, and through societal and governmental change.

In India, as elsewhere, aspirations of young women are noted to be symbolic of the social benefits of liberalization. But even as young Indian women embrace the autonomy and worldliness of modern women, they continue to remain under pressure to conform to family values of middle-class domesticity. The socio-economic fall-out of the Covid-19 pandemic has placed extra burden of unpaid work on them.

Yet, back of the envelope calculations suggest that the number of educated, career-oriented women - both rural and urban - are bound to rise as millennials continue to advance. Alongside, the number of older men in the labour market is expected to see a gradual decline. This will make it imperative for organizations to focus on utilizing female

talent in the coming decades. However, in the absence of sustainable career models, optimizing the productivity of the female workforce will remain a challenge.

REFERENCES

[1] Allen, T. D., French, K. A., & Poteet, M. L. (2016). Women and career advancement. Organizational Dynamics, 45(3), 206–216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2016.07.006

[2] Andresen, M., & Biemann, T. (2013). A taxonomy of internationally mobile managers. International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24(3), 533–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.697476

[3] Bonache, H., Carballo, V., Chas, A., & Delgado, N. (2020). Go the extra mile: a gender approach towards parenthood in early-career academics. Journal of Gender Studies, 00(00), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1836482

[4] Bowles, H. R., Thomason, B., & Bear, Ju. B. (2019). Reconceptualizing what and how women negotiate for career advancement. Academy of Management Journal, 62(6), 1645–1671. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2017.1497

[5] BusinessWire India, https://www.business-standard.com/content/press-releases-ani/budget-2022-india-likely-to-see-a-jump-in-women-workforce-participation-in-urban-india-by-10-percent-122020200634_1.html#:~:text=in%20Urban%20India.-,As%20per%20the%20statistics%20available%2C%20Women's%20employability%20is%20at%2051.44,over%20the%20last%20three%20decades.

[6] Cardador, M. T. (2017). Promoted up but also out? The unintended consequences of increasing women's representation in managerial roles in engineering. Organization Science, 28(4), 597–617. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2017.1132

[7] Catalyst. (2018). Women in the Workforce: Quick take. Catalyst, 1–7. https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-workforce-global

[8] Catalyst. (2020). Women in management: quick take. Catalyst, 6. https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management/

[9] Cooper, R., Baird, M., Foley, M., & Oxenbridge, S. (2020). Normative collusion in the industry ecosystem: Explaining women's career pathways and outcomes in investment management. Human Relations. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720942826

[10] de Vos, A., van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & Akkermans, J. (2020). Sustainable careers: Towards a conceptual model. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 117(March), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.011

[11] Dhanraj T. Dhangar. (2019). Work Life Integration Mid Career Women. 0–224.

[12] Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. Leadership Quarterly, 14(6), 807–834. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.004

[13] Gillian Pascal, S. P. & J. E. (2012). Women in Banking Careers. Journal of Gender Studies, 2012.

[14] Graven, W., & Krishnan, M. (2018). Capturing the potential: advancing gender equality in the Dutch labor market. September, 29. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured Insights/Europe/The power of parity Advancing gender equality in the Dutch labor market/MGI-Power-of-Parity-NL-English-version-September-2018.ashx

[15] Kang, L. S., & Kaur, G. (2020a). Contextual Support and Career Aspirations of Working Women. South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management. https://doi.org/10.1177/2322093720967803

[16] Kang, L. S., & Kaur, G. (2020b). Personal Cognitive Factors Affecting Career Aspirations of Women Working in Financial Sector in India. Vision, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972262920931344

[17] Karelaia, N., & Guillén, L. (2014). Me, a woman and a leader: Positive social identity and identity conflict. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 125(2), 204–219. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.08.002

[18] KENTTA, Goran, BENTZEN, Marte, DIEFFENBACH, Kristen and OLUSOGA, P. <http://orcid. org/0000-0001-8431-3853>. (2020). Challenges experienced by women high performance coaches and its association with sustainability in the profession. Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive, 0–35.

[19] Khilji, S. E., & Pumroy, K. H. (2019). We are strong and we are resilient: Career experiences of women engineers. Gender, Work and Organization, 26(7), 1032–1052. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12322

[20] Krishnan, D. (2020). As India advances, women's workforce participation plummets. Strategy+Business, 1–16. https://www.strategy-business.com/blog/As-India-advances-womens-workforce-participation-plummets?gko=762f7

[21] Kurnia, D. (2017). EFFECTS OF GLASS CEILING ON WOMEN CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA. International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity, 4(2), 9–15.

[22] Lyness, K. S., & Terrazas, J. M. B. (2008). Women in Management: An Update on Their Progress and Persistent Challenges. International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology 2006, 21, 267–294. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470696378.ch6

[23] Madaan, N., Mehta, S., Malhotra, V., Aggarwal, A., Delhi, M., & Saxena, M. (2018). Analyze, Detect and Remove Gender Stereotyping from Bollywood Movies. Proceedings of Machine Learning Research, 81, 1–14.

[24] Makarem, Y., & Wang, J. (2020). Career experiences of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields: A systematic literature review. Human Resource Development Quarterly, 31(1), 91–111. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21380

[25] Padmanabhan, M., & Sampath Kumar, S. (2016). Work-Life Balance and Work-Life Conflict on Career Advancement of Women Professionals in Information and Communication Technology Sector, Bengaluru, India. Work-Life Balance and Work-Life Conflict on Career Advancement of Women Professionals in Information and Communication Technology Sector, 4(6), 119–130. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.56642

[26] Pas, B., Peters, P., Doorewaard, H., Eisinga, R., & Lagro-Janssen, T. (2014). Supporting "superwomen"? Conflicting role prescriptions, gender-equality arrangements and career motivation among Dutch women physicians. Human Relations, 67(2), 175–204. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713489998

[27] Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) – Annual Report [July, 2019 – June, 2020] https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1738163

[28] Powell, Gary N., M. (1992). Cross Currents in the River of time - Women's Careers. Journal of Management, 503(1), 122–136.

[29] Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2007). The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of

women to precarious leadership positions. Academy of Management Review, 32(2), 549–572. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2007.24351856

[30] Singh, W. N. (2018). From Teachers to Textbooks : Gender Stereotypes in Indian Schools. 1–8.

[31] Tandon, S., Kohli, A., & Bhalla, S. (2007). Barriers to leadership positions for Indian women in academic dentistry. International Dental Journal, 57(5), 331–337. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1875-595X.2007.tb00142.x

[32] Terborg, J. R., Peters, L. H., Ilgen, D. R., & Smith, F. (2018). Organizational and Personal Correlates of Attitudes Toward Women as Managers Academy of Management Journal, 20(1), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.5465/255464

[33] Tiron-Tudor, A., & Faragalla, W. (2018). Women Career Paths in Accounting Organizations: Big4 Scenario. Administrative Sciences, 8(4), 62. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci8040062

[34] Vijayakumar, G. (2013). "I'll Be Like Water": Gender, Class, and Flexible Aspirations at the Edge of India's Knowledge Economy. Gender and Society, 27(6), 777–798. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213499445

[35] Walsh, J. (2012). Not Worth the Sacrifice? Women's Aspirations and Career Progression in Law Firms. Gender, Work and Organization, 19(5), 508–531. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2012.00607.x

[36] Women in the Boardroom, A Global Perspective, Deloitte Reports, 2022 https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/risk/articles/women-in-the-boardroom-a-global-perspective-seventh-edition.html