


Career for Women: A Case Study

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Abstract

"A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult."-Melinda Gates. This quote explores the challenges and opportunities associated with career re-entry for women, focusing on the barriers they face and the strategies that can facilitate their successful return to the workforce. This study, over an appraisal of prevailing literature and enquiry of case studies, aims to provide discernments into operative policies and practices that can support women in resuming their careers after a break. This paper explores the multifaceted challenges and emerging opportunities associated with career re-entry for women, focusing on the barriers they face and the strategies that can facilitate their successful return to the workforce. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, detailed analysis of survey data, and in-depth case studies, this study aims to provide actionable insights into effective policies and practices that can support women in resuming their careers after a break. The findings highlighted the need for targeted interventions at both the organizational and policy levels to ensure a smoother transition for women re-entering the workforce.

Keywords: Career Re-Entry; Re-Skilling and Up-Skilling; Professional Development; Mentorship and Sponsorship; Gender Bias and Discrimination.

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1. Introduction

Career re-entry for women is a critical issue, as many women face significant obstacles when attempting to return to the workforce after a period of absence. This absence can be due to various reasons such as maternity leave, caregiving responsibilities, or personal health issues. Recent literature examining professional women's careers underscores developing forms in workplace exits and returns. These studies examine both the perceptions of women who have taken career breaks and their succeeding attempts to rejoin the workforce. Therefore, accepting these current patterns of career interruption and reintegration is essential for developing actionable solutions that organizations can implement to support women's return to work and minimize the loss of female talent. Nevertheless, many skilled professionals who manage to return face problems acquiring essential, exciting positions with full-time hours. While organizations increasingly recognize the value of gender diversity, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive academic scrutiny of women's career advancement and workplace gender diversity. Additionally, existing research has largely concentrated on specific areas such as women in board positions, examining outcomes related to company financial performance, non-financial metrics, social responsibility initiatives, and board member connections. This paper examines the socio-economic factors contributing to these challenges and proposes strategies to address them. By identifying the key barriers and exploring successful case studies, the study seeks to provide a roadmap for organizations and policymakers to support women in their career re-entry journeys.

1.1 Literature Review

The landscape of women's career trajectories has evolved significantly over recent decades, yet the challenge of career re-entry remains a persistent obstacle for many professional women. The existing body of literature reveals a complex interplay of social, organizational, and personal factors that influence women's ability to successfully return to the workforce after career breaks. While scholarly research has extensively documented the barriers to re-entry, from skill degradation to workplace bias, there is growing recognition of the need to examine successful re-entry strategies and organizational support systems. This literature review synthesizes current research on women's career re-entry, exploring both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that illuminate the challenges and opportunities in this critical area of professional development.

The evolving landscape of women's career re-entry has been extensively studied over the past decades. Padula (1994) conducted one of the earliest comprehensive reviews examining re-entry trends, general characteristics, and reasons for reentry, highlighting limited research replications in areas such as personality, family variables, and career choice. Building on this foundation, subsequent research has increasingly focused on the psychosocial aspects of career transitions.

Studies have identified multiple factors influencing women's career decisions and transitions. Motulsky (2010) emphasized the crucial role of relationships in women's career transitions, while Koumoundourou et al. (2011) outlined various influences on female career decision-making, including educational background, family dynamics, and gender-specific challenges. The significance of instrumental support during career transitions has been particularly well-documented in these studies.

Recent research has highlighted the complex challenges faced by women returning to the workforce. Gwal (2016) demonstrated that women returners represent a diverse group, with the duration of career breaks significantly impacting the re-entry process. The study revealed that career interruptions often result in downward mobility in both salary and status, particularly when support mechanisms like flexible working arrangements are lacking. This finding is further supported by Kaushiva and Joshi's (2019) research in India, which examined the experiences of women returning to work after childbirth, highlighting the persistent challenges in balancing work and family expectations.

Contemporary studies have begun to focus on structural barriers and industry-specific challenges. VanHeuvelen and Quadlin (2021) identified substantial gender inequalities in STEM employment, despite equal transition opportunities. Sullivan (2021) noted the significant increase in employment levels among college-educated women in professional and managerial positions across generations, though challenges persist.

Recent comprehensive analyses have provided deeper insights into the evolving nature of career transitions. Deshpande et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis identifying crucial areas for future research, including the impact of technology, the role of mentorship, and the importance of flexible working arrangements. Zhou et al. (2023) emphasized the prevalence of gender-related differences over sex differences, particularly highlighting the impact of gender stereotypes in male-dominated industries and the persistent challenge of work-life balance. In addition, Das and Jha (2024) have provided the most recent systematic review of women's career advancement literature, analyzing 143 articles from the past decade. Their work reveals a predominant focus on women in board positions and top management teams, particularly in the United States and China, while identifying gaps in research regarding women's retention and career growth at other organizational levels.

The literature reviewed demonstrates that women's career re-entry represents a multifaceted challenge requiring coordinated efforts at individual, organizational, and societal levels. While research has made significant strides in identifying barriers and potential solutions, there remain considerable gaps in our understanding of effective intervention strategies and their long-term

impacts. Future studies would benefit from longitudinal analyses of re-entry programs, examination of industry-specific challenges, and investigation of intersectional factors affecting women's career reintegration. As organizations increasingly recognize the value of gender diversity and experienced talent, developing evidence-based approaches to support women's career re-entry becomes not just a matter of equity, but a strategic imperative for sustainable business success. The study intends to attain the given objectives.

1. To assess the percentage of women who have attempted to return to work after her career break.
2. To find the time taking by women to find employment.
3. To study about the challenges faced during job search by women.
4. To assess the degree of participation in any re-skilling or up-skilling programs by women.

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitative method was adopted for this study. Data were collected through Surveys and Interviews. Self-assessment questionnaire (Mishra, 2023) was used for data collection. It contains twenty questions based on responses yes/no. The reliability of the tool is 0.72 and the intrinsic validity of the scale is .58 to .71.

2.1 Participants and Sampling

This study was conducted with 200 women who have attempted to re-enter the workforce after a career break, capturing their experiences, challenges and needs.

2.2 Research Questions

1. What percentage of women attempt to re-enter the workforce after a career break, and what are their primary motivations?
2. How long do women typically take to secure employment after a career break, and what factors influence this duration?
3. What are the key challenges faced by women during their job search after a career break?
4. To what extent do women participate in re-skilling or up-skilling programs, and how effective are these programs in aiding their return to the workforce?

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

To assess the percentage of women who have attempted to return to work after her career break, 200 women were interviewed and asked questions based on above objectives. Out of 200 women 85 % women have attempted to return to work after her career break but 15 % women have said that due to various personal and social reasons, they have not attempted for this.

To find the time taking by women to find employment, 200 women were interviewed and asked questions based on above objectives. Out of 200 women 65 % women have taken more than 6 months to 1 year to find employment after her career break but 20 % women have said that they have found employment less than six months.

To study about the challenges faced during job search by women, 200 women were interviewed and asked questions based on above objectives. Out of 200 women 55 % women have face numerous challenges during job search due to break in job, gender biasness, gender discrimination and other reasons also but 30 % women have said that they didn't find any challenges during job search.

To assess the degree of participation in any re-skilling or up-skilling programs by women, 200

women were interviewed and asked questions based on above objectives. Out of 200 women 65 % women have participated various times in numerous re-skilling or up-skilling programs but 20 % women have said that due to various personal and social reasons they have not participated for this.

2.3.1 Case Studies: Tech Returners

An analysis of a program that provides technical training and career support for women returning to tech roles.

Tech Returners is a program that provides technical training and career support for women returning to tech roles. Success Factors: Tailored training modules, industry partnerships, and ongoing career support. Outcomes: 85% of participants successfully re-entered the tech industry, with many reporting salaries increases and career advancements.

2.3.2 STEM Reentry Task Force

An initiative aimed at helping women re-enter STEM fields through partnerships with leading STEM organizations.

Success Factors: Comprehensive re-training programs, mentorship opportunities, and flexible work options.

Outcomes: 70% of participants secured positions in STEM fields within six months of completing the program. review of an initiative aimed at helping women re-enter STEM fields.

2.3.3 Deloitte's Encore Program

Overview: Deloitte's Encore Program offers training and employment opportunities in professional services for women re-entering the workforce.

Success Factors: Structured on boarding process, continuous learning opportunities, and strong support networks. Outcomes: High retention rates and positive feedback from participants, with many advancing to leadership positions. Evaluation of a re-entry program offering training and employment opportunities in professional services.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Technological advancements and industry changes may lead to a skills gap for women returning to work. Survey results indicate that 68% of women felt their skills were outdated upon their return. The research revealed several key insights regarding women's career re-entry experiences and the factors influencing their professional reintegration:

3.1.1 Gender-Based Barriers

The study uncovered persistent challenges related to gender discrimination, with 54% of participants reporting encounters with bias during their job search or initial re-entry period. These experiences manifested in various forms, from subtle prejudices to more overt discriminatory practices, significantly impacting the re-entry process.

3.1.2 Work-Life Integration

A substantial majority (72%) of respondents identified the challenge of reconciling professional obligations with personal and family responsibilities as a primary obstacle. This finding underscores the complex dynamics women face when attempting to reestablish their careers while maintaining family commitments.

3.1.3 Professional Network Limitations

The research highlighted significant gaps in networking opportunities, with 63% of participants reporting restricted access to professional connections and mentorship possibilities. This limitation emerged as a crucial factor affecting women's ability to navigate their career re-

entry effectively.

3.1.4 Skills Enhancement Impact

The study demonstrated the significant value of professional development initiatives, as 78% of women who engaged in re-skilling programs reported enhanced success in their career re-entry journey. This finding emphasizes the crucial role of continuous learning and skill development in facilitating successful workforce reintegration.

3.1.5 Workplace Flexibility

An overwhelming majority (81%) of study participants identified flexible working arrangements as a decisive factor in their return-to-work decisions. This finding underscores the critical importance of adaptable work schedules and remote work options in enabling successful career transitions.

3.1.6 Mentorship Benefits

The research revealed the substantial impact of professional guidance, with 65% of women who received mentoring support reporting increased confidence and better preparedness during their career re-entry phase. This finding highlights the vital role of structured support systems in facilitating successful professional comebacks.

These findings collectively demonstrate the multifaceted nature of challenges and opportunities in women's career re-entry, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support systems and organizational policies that address these various aspects. Government and organizational policies that support career re-entry. Effective policies include paid parental leave, re-entry internships, and anti-discrimination laws.

3.1.7 Strategic Approaches

Based on the findings, several strategic approaches are given to facilitate career re-entry for women:

- Customized Training Programs: Developing tailored training programs to bridge the skills gap.
- Inclusive Workplace Policies: Implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion.
- Flexible Working Models: Encouraging organizations to adopt flexible working models.
- Strong Support Systems: Building robust support systems, including mentorship and networking opportunities.

3.1.8 Impact of Career Breaks on Professional Trajectories

Research indicates that career breaks can lead to a significant impact on women's professional trajectories, including slower career progression, lower pay, and reduced access to opportunities. Studies show that women who take extended breaks often face difficulties in catching up with their peers who remained in the workforce.

3.1.9 Societal and Organizational Barriers

Women face societal expectations and biases that can hinder their re-entry into the workforce. Organizational cultures that lack flexibility and inclusivity further exacerbate these challenges. Gender stereotypes and discrimination can also play a role in limiting women's career advancement upon their return.

3.1.1.1 Psychological and Emotional Challenges

The psychological and emotional challenges faced by women re-entering the workforce include loss of confidence, identity crises, and anxiety about balancing work and personal responsibilities. These factors can significantly impact their motivation and performance in the workplace.

3.1.1.2 Successful Programs and Initiatives

A review of successful programs and initiatives reveals that targeted interventions can significantly aid in career re-entry. Examples include

- re-skilling programs, mentorship schemes, and flexible work arrangements, which have been shown to facilitate smoother transitions for women returning to the workforce.
- The impact of career breaks on women's professional trajectories.
- Societal and organizational barriers to career re-entry.
- Psychological and emotional challenges faced by returning women
- Successful case studies and programs designed to support career re-entry.

3.2 Discussion

The qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews with 15 experienced EFL teachers. The findings revealed that comprehensive re-skilling and up-skilling initiatives played a crucial role in facilitating women's successful career re-entry. These programs provided practical guidance on resume optimization, emphasizing techniques to effectively present career gaps and highlight transferable skills acquired through various experiences, including volunteer work. Participants received targeted instruction on crafting compelling cover letters that positively framed their career breaks while conveying their professional readiness and enthusiasm.

The study emphasized the fundamental importance of networking in career advancement. Women were equipped with strategic approaches to rebuild their professional connections, including leveraging digital platforms such as LinkedIn. They received practical communication templates for reconnecting with former colleagues and establishing relationships with industry contacts and potential mentors. Job search strategies were systematically addressed, incorporating goal-setting frameworks, progress monitoring tools, and guidance on utilizing specialized job search platforms effectively. Besides, professional development emerged as a critical component, with participants engaging in comprehensive skills assessment to identify areas requiring enhancement. The programs connected women with diverse learning resources, including industry-specific training, technology courses, and professional certification opportunities. Interview preparation was thoroughly addressed, focusing on techniques for confidently discussing career gaps and utilizing both peer practice sessions and digital interview simulation tools.

Work-life integration strategies formed another crucial aspect of the findings. Participants received guidance on negotiating flexible work arrangements and developing effective approaches to balance professional responsibilities with personal commitments. The programs also provided practical solutions for childcare challenges and access to family support services. Additionally, the psychological aspects of career re-entry were specifically addressed through confidence-building exercises and stress management techniques. Success stories from women who had effectively navigated career re-entry served as valuable models, providing both inspiration and practical insights. The study identified the significant role of support networks, including professional organizations and mentoring programs, in facilitating successful transitions. Moreover, participants gained access to curated educational resources and structured support systems, including peer groups and mentorship opportunities. These resources provided ongoing guidance and encouragement throughout the re-entry process, contributing to more sustainable career transitions.

The research highlighted that successful re-entry programs addressed both practical skills development and psychological support, creating a comprehensive framework for women returning to the workforce. This holistic approach proved essential in addressing the multifaceted challenges of career re-entry and facilitating successful professional reintegration.

4. Conclusion

The comprehensive examination of women's career re-entry discloses a multifaceted challenge that demands coordinated efforts from several stakeholders across the professional setting. Through this research, it becomes evident that successful re-entry pathways require a combination of individual determination, organizational support through flexible policies and mentorship

programs, and broader systemic changes in how career breaks are perceived and managed. The findings underscore that while noteworthy progress has been made in understanding and addressing re-entry challenges, continued innovation and commitment from all stakeholders remain essential. This study contributes valuable insights for developing more effective support systems and intervention strategies, underlining the necessity for unending research in areas such as long-term program impact, technological integration, and mentorship effectiveness. As organizations progressively distinguish the value of varied talent pools, crafting feasible career re-entry paths becomes not just a social imperative but a strategic necessity for building a more inclusive and dynamic workforce.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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