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Women Workforce Attrition Dynamics in Indian IT/ ITES sector

Sharda Singh
ICFAI Busines School, sharda.singh@ibsindia.org

Shirshendu Ganguli
T.A.Pai Management Institute, shirshenduganguli@tapmi.edu.in

Rajasekhar David
ICFAI Business School, Hyderabad., rajasekhar.p@ibsindia.org

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to identify various factors responsible for women's workforce attrition in Indian IT/ITES sector. Thematic analysis was used to generate the factors affecting women's workforce attrition. For the purpose of the study, semi-structured in depth interviews were conducted with some of the women employees of different IT companies. Interviews can be broadly classified into four sections. The first section dealt with personal profiles; second part contained a discussion on the benefits provided by organizations; third part elaborates on factors responsible for women's workforce attrition; and the last part dealt with suggestions on reducing attrition rate among women's workforce in India IT/ITES industry. Thematic analysis of the interview scripts provided two broad themes, namely intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors consist of work life balance and motherhood whereas extrinsic factors include work pressure, long working hour, faulty appraisal practices, forceful transfers, and less cooperative colleagues. The will help the IT/ITES companies to understand the factors responsible for high attrition rate among women workforce. It helps in understanding the psyche of women workforce, which in turn can help the managers to build and retain their talent pool. The study also provides a holistic view to human resource strategies and policies that accommodate the work life need of the diverse women workforce in the current business environment.

Keywords

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Sharda Singh
ICFAI Business School, Hyderabad, India

Shirshendu Ganguli
T. A. Pai Management Institute, Manipal, India

Rajasekhar David
ICFAI Business School, Hyderabad, India

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The information technology (IT) and information technology enabled services (ITES) industry has been one of the key driving forces fueling India's economic growth. The industry has not only transformed India's image on the global platform, but also fueled economic growth by energizing the higher education sector (especially engineering and computer science). It has employed almost 10 million Indians and hence, has contributed a lot to social transformation in the country. Indian IT industry contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased from 1.2% in Financial Year 1998 to 9.5% in Financial Year 2015 (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2016). This sector has also led to massive employment generation. It has approximately 4 million technical workers and industry body NASSCOM estimates that the average male to female ratio has become 70:30. Every second recruit entering the $60-billion Indian IT industry is a woman (NASSCOM Report, 2009). So, there is immense importance of women IT professionals in the dramatic growth of IT/ITES industry.

Today, attrition is one of the most important issues in any organization. Employee attrition depends on several factors like internal job posting, work profile, personal causes, better career opportunities/compensation (Bhatnagar, 2007). Human capital involves both

tangible and intangible costs. Beside tangible cost like replacement cost it also involves intangible cost like loss of intellectual capital and low employee morale. Employees carry invaluable tacit knowledge with them when leaving an organization (especially IT companies) and that can become a competitive advantage for the competitors. This makes attrition management very crucial in IT industry.

Retention is often governed by motivation and realization that the recognition and training needs of each individual are different (Williams, 2004). So, organizations need to appreciate the various differences among employees like gender, cultural, behavioral, while forming the retention policies. For example, males have dominant traits of aggressiveness, achievement and growth orientation, whereas for females the important behavioral indicators include the vulnerability of both physical and mental space and affiliation (Pande, Malhotra, & Namy, 2012). At times, because of the social structure of India, females tend to overlook factors like career development, since in most of the cases Indian females work for a limited period of time because of marriage or family related issues (Yadav, Sarangdevot, & Sharma, 2012). This paper focuses on the broader perspective of gender and tries to understand women perspectives which are leading to attrition.

Large Indian software companies like TCS, Wipro, Infosys were unable to reduce high female staff attrition rate. This research aims to gain better understanding of the reasons that lead to women's workforce attrition from reputed Indian software companies which provide benefits like six figure salary, long maternity leave, work from home option, open to offer relocation to the city of their choice (where husband got transferred).

In addressing these issues, the paper adopts the following structure; the first section offers a literature review related to the women workforce attrition. The second section of the paper deals with the methodology and related data collection and analysis methods. The penultimate section includes results and discussion. Finally, the paper concludes with managerial implications of the research.

Literature Review

The IT/ITES industry has the potential to transform India. The key factor that facilitates the success of India's software industry is that, it can be built entirely on human capital; require limited infrastructure and upfront investment. It has good cash flow and is highly profitable (Bhatnagar, 2007). Needless to say that, the success of any IT company purely depends on knowledge and expertise of its employees (Bhatnagar, 2007). Being an employee centric industry, employee retention directly influences the growth of the company. The biggest concern of any organization is to address the issue of voluntary attrition, for maintaining consistency in performance (Bisht & Singh, 2012).

Because of high attrition rate, Indian software industry is not able to progress beyond providing low end software coding, development and maintenance services (Arora, Arunachalam, Asundi, & Fernandes, 2001).High attrition hurts the performance of the IT industry and restricts its progress (Arora et al., 2001). Loss of human assets leads to replacement cost and work disruption (Bhist & Singh, 2012). There is a negative correlation between high attrition and the quality of service. That's why the replacement of existing employee is costly as well as destructive (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2006).

The rapid growth in FDI is increasing competition for existing IT companies and providing more job opportunities for software professionals. This competition among IT companies is also increasing the attrition rate (Agrawal & Thite, 2003). When employees are not satisfied with their jobs, then they start exploring options in the market with a turnover intention and turnover intention is strongly correlated with voluntary turnover (Chafetz, Erickson, & Ensell, 2009). Other reasons for the high attrition rate can be inefficiency in

management policies, hiring policies, faulty/inadequate retention strategies, improper training and development initiatives, work culture (Bisht & Singh, 2012). Because of numerous opportunities present in the marketplace, the employees are not willing to spend their whole career with the same employer (Ghosh & Geetika, 2006).Employees are more loyal to their profession than to organization where they work. There are lots of push factors like improper work life balance, poor relations with co-workers and stress at work. Pull factors include better compensation, more interesting work, promotion opportunities, desire to return to academic studies (Ho, Downe, & Loke, 2010). Employees usually show withdrawal behavior before leaving the company (Nagadevara, Srinivasan, & Valk, 2008). The key factors influencing workforce attrition can be classified into five categories viz individual, organizational, job related, psychological and environmental factors (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2001). For IT professionals the most important aspects of the job are job security and technical competence (Agarwal & Feratt, 2002). Employees are not motivated only by hygienic factors like salaries alone (Bhatnagar, 2007), they look for other softer rewards like challenging job, clarity of work, training and career advancement opportunities etc.

Retention strategies can be framed with the realization that the recognition and training needs of each individual are different (William, 2004). By providing an opportunity of higher education or management development program can reduce attrition and also help in the development of HR for the higher responsibilities. To reduce attrition, it is suggested that companies need to provide various options like good rewards, bonding programs, flexible working hours and providing a stronger career path to the employees (NASSCOM-Everest Report, 2008). Paychecks alone are not enough to motivate employees. The management also needs to consider other aspects like secure career, benefits, perks and open communication. Retention of key employees is critical to the long-term health and success of any organization. It is a known fact that retaining your best employees ensures customer satisfaction, increased product sales, satisfied colleagues and reporting staff, effective succession planning and deeply imbedded organizational knowledge and learning (Bhatnagar, 2007; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Singh & Prakaash, 2013).12 retention strategies are compensation, employee recognition, healthy management practices, building brand name, developing a sustainable culture, recruit the right people, provide career advancement opportunities, part time employees have to be treated with due diligence, make work fun for the employees, balance between work life and personal life, employee safety should be on the priority list and employee engagement (Kodikal, Pakkeerappa, & Ahmed, 2012). It is understood that instead of framing various retention strategies, companies need to identify the right candidate at the time of recruitment.

Women are an estimated 31.2% of all economically active individuals. Women earn 62% of men's salary for equal work (Central Statistics Office; CSO, 2012). However, women are just 3% of legislative, management, and senior official positions. Working women in India face many challenges. Studies have found: women have to work harder to prove themselves, men do not respect women bosses and prefer to have them as subordinates as opposed to the superiors and women are excluded from informal networks (Ahmad, 1979). There is a decline in the representation of women in all occupations like teaching, medicine, nursing etc. (Ahmad, 1979). According to Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia (Community Business, 2011), India has the lowest national female labor force and the worst leaking pipeline for junior to middle level position women. Of 1,112 directorships on the Bombay Stock Exchange 100, just 59 (5.3%) are held by women. Despite occupying small percentages of leadership positions, 97.2% of women (compared to 95.6% of men) aspire to jobs with increased responsibility. It has been suggested that the professional skills of women need to be enhanced, therefore a number of mentorship program are organized (Lewis, 2010). The low share of women in gross domestic production (GDP) may occur for two reasons: First, a lower share of women's

employment compared to the total official employees of the country and the second reason is low wage of women compared to men (Avazalipour, Damankeshideh, Hakimipoor, & Faramarzi, 2012).

The basic reasons for women's attrition are traditional gender role and lack of role model, the undervaluing of women in traditional communication and leadership style and organizational culture (Salas-Lopez, Deitrick, Mahady, Gertner, & Sabino, 2011). Organizational cultures are male dominated and that can be considered as one of the reasons for women's workforce attrition (Marshall, 1991). Age and marital status determine whether or not a woman is likely to work outside the home and what job she is willing to take (Ahmad, 1979). Frequently working women suffer from role conflict, family responsibility and life balance (Salas-Lopez et al., 2011). IT sector offers a potential employment opportunity for women. It is trying to improve the gender ratio in their workforces by formulating 'woman friendly' policies, such as options for part-time work or working from home, provision of crèche, and so on. All companies give three months' paid maternity leave as mandated by law, with an option for a further three months' unpaid leave. Several companies have instituted special programs aimed at mentoring women and addressing their specific issues (Bhattacharya &Ghosh, 2012).

It is clear from the above review of literature that there is a limited number of research work regarding women employees' attrition rate in the Indian software industry. The increasing number of women employees has changed the demographics of Indian IT/ITES industries and the research is needed to explore it, especially from the women employees' point of view. This research work is intended to find out all the factors influencing women's workforce attrition in Indian IT/ITES industry, from the perspective of women. Hence the ***objective*** of this research study is ***to explore the various reasons behind the high attrition rate of women employees in Indian IT/ITES sector, from the perspective of women employees.***

Research Design

As the objective of the study was to explore the reasons for high attrition among women in IT/ITES sector of India, purposeful sampling was used to select respondents wherein only information rich cases were chosen (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003).

After seeking permission from the institutional review board which includes head of department and senior faculty members at our university, we approached participants and explained them the objective of the study. As per their convenience, participants decided the mode of interview either over telephone or in person. Participants were also assured about their anonymity and only after taking consent their interviews were recorded. Eight Indian women from IT/ITES sector were interviewed who are working in different companies, in different states, at different levels of hierarchy and with varying levels of experience.

Six interviews were conducted by telephone and two in person. The age of the participants ranged between 28 to 40 years. Out of 8 women, 5 were married and 80% of them had children. All of them belong to middle level management where 3 participants had 10 to 15 years of experience and 5 participants have 5 to 10 years of experience (refer to Table 1).Interviews were broadly classified into four sections. Semi structured interview was conducted. The broader questions were designed well in advance on the basis of general understanding derived from literature review on the subject. The first section deals with personal profiles here the respondents were asked to talk about themselves, their family and also about their job profile. The introductory question was like *tell me something about yourself* further probing was done to ask about their family structure and number of children if it was not explained by participants. After receiving the personal detail the next probing question was, *Tell me about your job profile and organization*. The second part was about the benefits

provided by organizations, here the questions were like *can we call your organization women friendly? Do you feel the gender equality in your company's plan and policies? What are the policies your organization have for the women welfare? So on.* The third part dealt with exploring factors responsible for women's workforce attrition, here the questions were like *Did you observe more female workforce attrition your organization than your male counterpart?, Do you feel any lacuna in your organization policies and practices which is leading to higher women attrition?, since you have a pretty good experience of working in IT industry, can you tell me what could be possible causes for high women attrition in this sector, so on* and the last part collected their suggestions to reduce women's workforce attrition here the questions were like *Can you suggest some initiatives that can be taken by managers in order to reduce the high women attrition in this sector, what women employees can do to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives, so on*. Data collection was continued until saturation of information occurred and no new information was obtained from respondents. Each interview was analyzed before conducting the next interview, which help the researchers to identify the information saturation and need not to proceed further.

Table 1: Sample Profile

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Responde nts	Job profile	Age (in yrs)	Marital status	Having children	Total work experience (in year)
1	Software developer	28	Single	No	5-10 years
2	Business analyst	32	Married	Yes	5-10 years
3	HR Manager	40	Single	No	10-15 years
4	Quality Analyst	29	Married	Yes	5-10 years
5	System architect	34	Married	Yes	10-15 years
6	Project Manager	33	Married	Yes	5-10 years
7	HR Manager	36	Single	No	10-15 years
8	Customer support executive	31	Married	No	5-10 years

Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied with the help of NVivo 7 software to analyze the data. All the interviewed were recorded and transcribed manually. Transcriptions were analyzed by using Braun and Clarke (2006) method of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested six phases to conduct the thematic analysis. The first phase was familiarizing yourself with your data and for that sake we read and re read the transcript of all the eight respondents. The second step was to generating initial codes and in this stage, software had coded the transcription into thirty-one initial codes, most of which were data driven. The third step was to search for themes, in this phase collated codes were converted into distinct themes. These were the potential themes which were drawn from the initial codes. The initial themes were benefits, problems, HR practices, organizational motives and organizational culture. The fourth step was to reviewing the themes, we requested two experts, one from academics and one from industry to review and refine the themes. As both the experts suggested to not to consider benefits provided by the industry rather focus on the other themes which were more related to the objective of the study. The fifth stage was to defining and naming themes, we defined these themes as per our understanding of the review of other papers. After refinement seven themes were emerged and broadly categorized into two categories which were labeled

as intrinsic and extrinsic (refer to Figure1). The final phase is to produce the report that will be taken care in following paper.

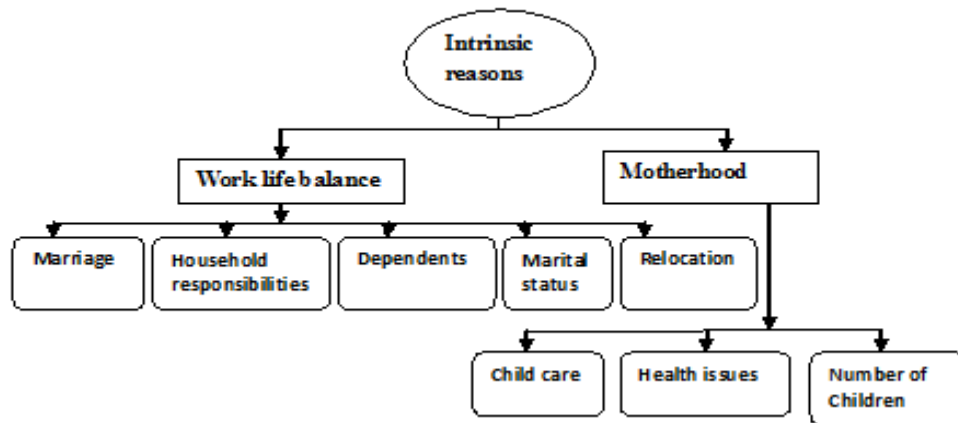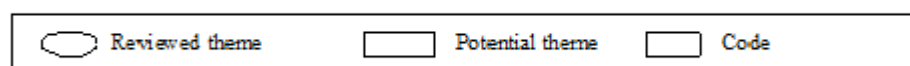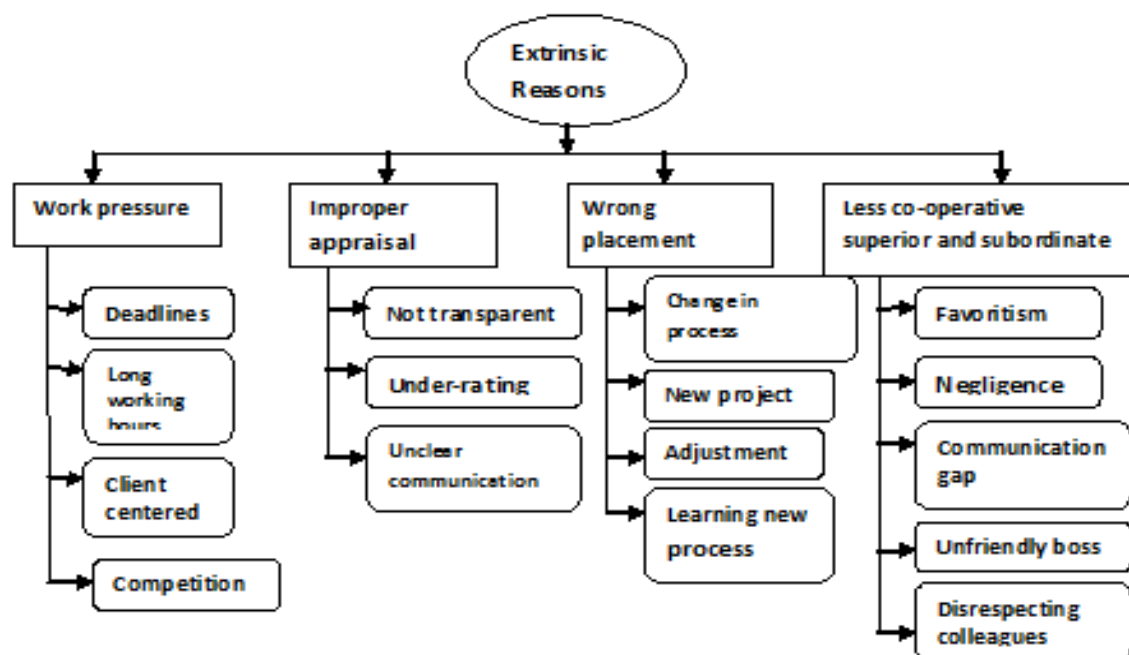Figure 1: Thematic Map for the Reviewed theme 1 (**Intrinsic reasons)**

Figure 2: Thematic Map for the Reviewed theme 2 (**Extrinsic reasons)**

Results

The women respondents cited a variety of reasons for leaving the organization. A series of common themes were identified after conducting interviews. This paper exclusively focused on issues raised by female respondents that were attributed directly or indirectly to attrition. There are two models and theory which explains the employee's attrition at workplace namely, image theory and the unfolding model. Image theory (Beach, 1998) states that on the basis of previous experience, employees leave the organization after assessing the reasons to quit whereas the unfolding model (Lee, Mitchell, Wise,& Fireman,1996) suggest that there are some internal and external shocks employees' leave organization. The unfolding model of employee voluntary attrition is based on image theory. As per image theory individuals form images on the basis of various information related to their current life situations. Lee and Mitchell (1994) proposed the four concepts of image theory. First, individuals have different set of images for their different arena of life. Second, images can be simple or complex. Third, image process in a sequential manner, starting from reception, interpretation, comparison and finally evaluation. Fourth, images can be change on the basis on new information but it is a rare phenomenon. Mitchell and Lee (2001) extended the unfolding theory with an assumption that individuals encounter with some events or shocks which trigger them to think about their current employment status. Mitchell and Lee (2001) proposed four paths which may lead to employee voluntary attrition. Path 1, In case of occurrence of some shock positive, negative or neutral, employees initiating an existing plan which has been previously developed and now that is ready for implementation. Path 2, the shock is so traumatic that immediate response is to leave without a plan. In this case employees themselves consider as personally unable to continue the employment. Path 3, the shock is not so severe but employee has better alternatives. Path 4, Employee is dissatisfied overtime with hope of changes or improvement in management plan and policies but leaving dissatisfied) without plan and alternatives or b) with proper plan and alternatives. Our themes were mostly in sync with unfolding model where individuals were aware about the possible issues but sudden shocks leads to immediate or delayed attrition with alternatives or without alternatives. Here we were using the two broader notions namely, intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for attrition. The two terms are reflecting the reasons for shocks - intrinsic reasons reflect shocks from changes in individuals' personal lives whereas extrinsic reasons reflect shocks from external world like from organization members, organization policies, market conditions so on and so forth.

Theme 1: Intrinsic Reasons

The intrinsic reasons can be defined as the personal reasons which vary from individual to individual and act as an internal shock, leading to attrition. The unfolding theory of attrition defined shock as a specific life event that triggers employees to consider leaving the organization (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Following similar definition of shock, we defined internal shock as individual's personal reasons that generate a thought of quitting the organization. Codes such as personal vs. professional lives, marriage, motherhood, and relocation were emerging from the statements because of their repetitive appearance in the verbatim. These codes were put together in order to make two potential sub-themes, namely work life balance and motherhood.

Work Life Balance

This theme was generated from the needs of the women employees in achieving a balance between the demand of their family and work. The findings of the study suggest that

women employees need sufficient time to deal with their personal, social and professional lives. Participants mentioned that they continually juggle between family and work which makes them anxious and restless which in turn affects their efficiency at both the domains. The prominent reason emphasized by the majority of respondents was the extra working hour. Respondent no. 2 mentioned that he IT/ITES industry has odd and long working hours in comparison to other industries which make their work-life balance more difficult. Respondent no. 7 mentioned that odd and long working hour had taken her chances to choose hobbies or leisure activities and maintain social relationships. We also noticed that married women with children were relatively more distressed because of imbalance in their work-life. While interviewing Respondent no. 4, she seems to be very restless and upset about her situation. She was making statements like "Why can't women have everything she desire in her life? Why she need to sacrifice one to get another?" It can be inferred that she was frustrated and not finding the right way to balance her different roles of life. "[….] I found that I had to juggle the priorities of being a mom at home and a wife with my own career and a professional in front of my colleagues and boss" (Respondent no 4).

Participant no. 2 mentioned that in her family the primary responsibility of women is to maintain the household activity. It was evident from the data that married participants were overburdened with household chores which leads to turmoil in their work and personal life roles. Respondent no: 8 was mentioning that she cannot think about working after marriage without permission and support of her husband and in-laws. It indicates that women themselves consider household activities as their primary responsibilities and professional life as secondary or value addition to their lives. So, participants were continuously mentioning the need of balance of time and involvement between personal and professional life for their well-being. Our conceptualization of work life balance was very similar to the Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003). They operationalized the concept of work-family balance as comprising three components. These are: (1) Time balance, whereby equal amounts of time are devoted to work and family; (2) Involvement balance, whereby an equal level of psychological involvement in work and family roles exists; and (3) Satisfaction balance, whereby an equal level of satisfaction is derived from work and family roles. It was evident that woman's work life and personal/family life may exert conflicting demands on each other.

Few more issues were identified in the course of the interview, which can be considered as a personal problem of women employees such as marriage or relocation. Three out of eight respondents of our study are seeking for relocation to other Indian offices. Respondent no. 8 seeks relocation because of her husband transferred there, whereas a respondent no. 1 wants relocation to stay close to her hometown and parents. But it was mentioned by respondents that their relocation depends on the kind of project they are handling and requirements of clients.

Motherhood and Health Related Issues

Most of married participants mentioned that they take more responsibilities of their children as compared to their husbands. The following quote illustrates the role of women in child care activities. "[…] you can find my husband right outside the school's gate to pick our son, but if my son gets sick, my husband will call me, even if I am halfway around the world […]" Respondent no. 6.

Respondents were also describing their juggle with their family members (child, husband, in-laws, likewise). Respondent no.2 quote illustrates the above statement, "[…] my mother suggested me to take off from work for some time, to take care of my child. When I denied that she threatened me to withdraw her help in my child care [….]".

It seems that child care responsibility majorly falls on the mother. The responsibilities of care for sick children usually fall on the mothers. This is one of the major personal reasons

which pushes working mother to take a break from job which leads to attrition. Respondents were describing the role and expectation from working women. Respondent no: 1 almost sobbed during interview and quoting that, "[…] I feel my kids are raised by my babysitter. Sometimes I feel guilty…. don't know what to do […] (respondent no 1).

The pauses and sad facial expression of the participant no. 1 during interview reflect that she is feeling guilty and helpless about her child care. One more code which appeared a number of times in the data is health issues. "[…] I come across various health issues after joining the job like irritable menstrual cycles, digestive disorders and high blood pressure. I feel along with my age, my job is equally responsible for my discomfort […]" (Respondent no. 7).

It can be inferred that IT industry also has some occupational hazard like fatigue, spondylosis, sleep difficulties, headache, backache, etc. due to the work pressure and long working hour. These health issues may not act as an immediate shock, but somewhere down the line lead to attrition.

Theme 2: Extrinsic Reasons

We define extrinsic reasons as external shocks received by the women employees from the environment (Organization) which consequently leads to attrition. Several codes were emerged in this theme which shows that external reasons are relatively more responsible for women's workforce attrition than internal reasons. Codes such as client centered, deadlines, bullying, biased project allocation, lack of support from bosses and colleagues were combined into four sub themes (work pressure, improper appraisal, wrong placement &forceful transfers and less co-operative superior and sub-ordinates) as shown in Figure 2. The brief discussion of each sub-theme is provided below:

Work Pressure

This theme was arrived after the repeated appearance of codes like deadlines, long working hours, client centered, etc. IT/ITES industries incorporated culture of long working hours and working against deadlines. Participant no. 3 had shared her observation that, IT employees feel personally responsible for finishing their tasks on time, even when faced with impossible deadlines. She told that, employees are driven by competition among themselves as well as the desire to be visible by working longer and harder than the other. But, it is not easy for women employees to work up to fourteen hours with a project deadline or even to stay overnight in the office, often they work on weekends as well. Women are unwilling or unable to put in as many hours as their male counterparts for several reasons like safety issues, domestic responsibilities. "[…] One problem which I faced is, when the project due date is close, then my manager forces me to work for longer duration and also on Sundays and Saturdays without extra pay […]" (Respondent no. 8).

Respondent no. 8 added to her quote that eventually extra working hour generates a feeling among women working professionals that this industry is not be suitable for them in the long run which in turn leading to attrition.

Improper Appraisal

Respondent No. 5 mentioned that she does not have a clear idea about the appraisal process, but she knows that it is related to various monetary and non-monetary benefits. Since they didn't understand appraisal process, it shows lack of transparency in the appraisal process. Lack of clarity about the appraisal parameters and the way they appraised in an organization

resulting in dissatisfaction with the process. While interviewing the women professionals, we came to know that in IT industry, there is a provision of discussion of appraisal with the appraisee, but it rarely happens. Respondents have shown the intention to quit the respective organization, where they are undervalued.

> […] If the women employees feel that they are more worthy and have been undervalued and are discontented about the way they have been appraised in the organization they prefer to switch to an organization which would recognize their contribution a bit more […]. (Respondent no. 4)

Undervalue appraisal may leads to dissatisfaction, conflicts, resentment, biases and eventual attrition. As like their male counterparts, women employees' expect ample of opportunities for career advancement in the organization. These kind of persisting biases and undervaluation instigate an individual to look for other jobs.

Wrong Placement and Forceful Transfers

The codes such as change in process, new process for new projects, learning, training, new team members likewise were accumulated together as a sub-theme of wrong placement and forceful transfers. This theme discusses the wrong placement of employees that can be understood as women employee asked to move to new project/place/department which demands lots of readjustment in her life. The statement below illustrates the sub-theme:
"[…] But I forcefully transferred to the commissioning department without taking my concern. Even when I complained to my HR, she also has no idea. She just gave permission without thought […]" (Respondent no. 5)

> […] I didn't get any good project for a year and meanwhile they transferred to 15 different offices in Mumbai wherever there is a chance of getting the project. Apart from this headache they are not providing transportation facility [...]. (Respondent no. 2)

The transfers from project, department or place will only lead to dissatisfaction and lack of productivity and finally leading to lay-off or attrition. Respondents were aware about the nature of IT/ITES sector, where employees are shifted from one process to another depending on the requirement of projects. But respondents mentioned that it generally takes time in getting acquainted with the new processes and shifting of the project and responsibilities puts additional pressure and stress on the employees, especially for the working women who experience acute role conflict. They find it difficult to combine the dual roles of housewife and mother on the one hand and that of a working women on the other. Some of the women employees adjust to these changes and some of the employees who find it difficult to adapt according to the new environment and get frustrated decide to leave the company.

> […]But I am not happy with my Job profile. It is not suitable for women. My job involves site visit across the state. Most of the time site doesn't have basic facilities. Management is aware with problems still pressurizing us to go to visit. It will be better to remove women from some departments. Office works are far better than field work for women, especially construction site visit. I am trying to get out of it as early as possible […]. (Respondent no. 6)

Less Cooperative Superior and Subordinates

As per our understanding, this sub-theme is defined as lack of support and guidance from supervisor and sub-ordinate. Few of the respondents felt that their bosses have torturing and teasing character. Respondents also complained that their bosses do not allow them to participate in decision making and above all no recognition and value for work.

> […] my boss always undermines my abilities. He never understands the concerns of his subordinates. He delegates the work which adds no value to my capabilities. He always tries to peep into my personal issues which have no relevance to my professional work. He is least supportive when it comes to encourage me in learning things that I am not familiar with […]. (Respondent no.3)

The tensed and strained facial expression along with high tones of Respondent no. 3 shows too much of anger and irritation toward her boss. She also mentioned two bad qualities of her boss namely, favoritism toward whom he like and negligence of her well-being. Other participants such as respondent no.4 revealed that the she experienced favoritism and lack of transparent practices by the team leaders (supervisors). We understand these grievances as the individual problems regarding working conditions and organization policies. But these grievances can flare when assignment distribution favors one and neglects another equally skilled and competent women employee, it may lead to turnover intentions. Respondents no. 4 revealed that the project distribution is not fair and people close or liked by team leader get the project instead of deserving person.

One more code that is the communication gap has occurred number of times in the data. This theme is focusing on communication between supervisor and employees. The statement below explains the lack of communication between supervisor and employees: "[…] again, my manager is not available all the time. I am not able to discuss my personal problems or problem related to work" (Respondent no. 4).

Respondents have shown the desire to have transparent policies for project allocation, promotion likewise and mentor-mentee relationship with their supervisor. Our understanding is similar to Rousseau (2004), she argued that women employees need to have a stronger psychological connection with their bosses which is based on relational need rather than a transactional need.

Respondent no. 5 shared her experience of differential treatment with their male counterparts. She also mentioned that her male co-workers engaged in politics and quite jealous of her career growth. It seems that women professional are severely affected by fellow worker behavior such as conflict and dispute among subordinates, politics among employees, co-worker guidance to get another employment opportunity and mischief of fellow workers. So, a helping and kind fellow worker may make working women life comforting whereas fellow worker with opposing personalities, work philosophies and ways of approaching tasks and problems may create a situation more challenging, confronting and irritating for working women. The following quote illustrates the pain of non-cooperative fellow worker:

> […] there is a lack of respect from male workers towards female workers on site. They feel women are lazy, less knowledgeable and less trained. Even my coworkers are not happy with our pay. Contractor appreciates male engineers and I also faced misbehavior […]. (Respondent no. 5)

Discussion and Managerial Implications

On the basis of extracted themes, researchers suggest the corporate leaders and mangers to understand the difference between values of men and women. It is an undisputable fact that men and women are different in many core ways. And this study is consistent with the findings of Brett and Stroh, (1994), that states the women professionals experience higher levels of stress at work and are leaving the organization for better career opportunities elsewhere. The present study is providing two major categories of reasons behind women workforce attrition on the basis of the unfolding theory of attrition. This can be considered as a detailed study which discusses both internal and external reasons for women workforce attrition. Starting with the first theme family responsibilities and life balance, managers need to understand that women are still performing the majority of domestic and child care activities. An organization must try to provide best work life friendly environment. Respondents felt that they are pushed aside regularly when they make their priorities known or demand time off after having a child. Our finding of women work-life balance is supporting the concern of Hochschild and Machung (1989) that entrance of women in paid occupations leads to imbalance in overall family economics which results in increase in divorce rates. The results of our study is also consistent with Reddy, Vranda, Ahmed, Nirmala, and Siddaramu, (2010).They empirically examined the impact of size of family, the age of children, the work hours and the level of social support. The problem of work life imbalance can be addressed to some extend by providing flexible working hour and work from home options. This will help women professionals in maintaining time and involvement balance between work and personal lives. Again the issues related to marriage and relocation needs to be handled delicately because in Indian society the first priority for most of the women is family. Bhatnagar (2007) also argues that flexible relocation policies might be one of the possible ways of reducing women workforce attrition in Indian software industries. The second theme is motherhood and health issues which reveal the fact that woman feel that they are not doing enough for their career as well as unable to take proper care of their children. In similar lines, Adamos (2013) stated that working mothers still perform most of the household chores even when both the parents are working. They struggle to manage professional life and personal life at one moment. There is a common notion in the mind of people that women who have professional careers are not able to achieve ideal motherhood like complete devotion to children. Most of the respondents said that they feel guilty of focusing on their professional career and not looking after their babies. Thus, when the professional stress invades the family life, women employees start exploring other options and often switch to other jobs, even if they have to compromise on their salary and benefits for a job where they could devote more time with their family. Our research is providing the reasons for the statistics collected by the center for Internet and Society Survey (2013), that there is no female as chairperson in the six largest IT companies in India and only 0.06% of senior management positions are held by women employees. Again, flexible working hour and work from home option will help in reducing women's workforce attrition a great extent. Subsequent themes are related to faulty HR practices and policies like improper appraisal, wrong placement, forceful transfers and poor grievance handling. Women employees appreciate authenticity and transparency in their job profile. This is supported by Dutta (2012), who mentioned that improper reward distributions lead to dissatisfaction, biases, conflict, resentment and finally attrition. Corporate managers must use employee friendly HR policies which should also be aligned with organizational objective and goal. Women employees are also suffering from non-work related stress like personality conflicts, disorganized supervisor, gossip, harassment, poor teamwork, manager abuse and general insensitivity of management toward women employees. Corporate leaders must embrace the benefits of gender diversity and they need to learn the art

of handling women talent pool. The difference in woman's style, approach, focus and energy needs to be understood.

Conclusion

Research on employee attrition in the organization has gained importance from both academicians and corporate world. The new concept of strategic human resource management puts the importance of human capital and indeed human capital development at the center of organizational success or failure. The effective management of human resource brings extraordinary performance to the firm. From employee relation point of view, software industries are very employee friendly because companies have to compete with each other for a small pool of well qualified employees. The IT/ITES industries claim to be women friendly and in fact computer programming is more attractive options for female graduate engineers than any other traditional jobs as a result it attracts a large number of women workforce. IT industries also claim that they have been trying to improve the gender ratio in the workplace by providing women friendly policies such as options for part time, work for home options, provision of crèches and so on. IT/ITES companies pride themselves on their attractive HR policies with strong advocacy about equality of opportunity and no gender biases, but the high rate of attrition in the women workforce is clearly visible in all types of software industries. The basic factors which come out of the research study are long working hours, high pressure work atmosphere, work life imbalance, improper HR policies, motherhood and health related issues, wrong placements, less cooperative superiors and subordinates and poor grievance handling procedures. The above mentioned factors forces women to drop out of the industry or to stagnate. Corporate leaders and HR managers fail to recognize that although they might treat women employees on par with men and even provide special facilities to cater their needs, Indian women still faces highly unequal domestic situation which make it difficult for her to manage such high pressure jobs. It is evident from this study that the effects of stressful work life and the effects of conflict arising from the juggling of work and family responsibilities leads to adverse physical and mental health consequences for women. For instance, long working hours lead to stress and mental health problems in women such as burnout, depression and a variety of other illnesses. Burnout in women leads to reduced energy, difficulties in dealing with others and difficulties completing the required tasks and duties of a job. They usually also have feelings of loss of control, helplessness and powerlessness. The findings revealed that proper balance of work and family life would produce a corresponding improvement in the quality of life. We can therefore conclude that positive stress, which is the competent management of stress, can enhance the well-being of women and can be harnessed to improve their job performance. We attempted to have a study sample that represented a cross-section in terms of education, experience, marital status, family background and geographic location, but our sample size was small. Although this sample size is enough for using qualitative technique like thematic analysis. Research is only conducted in Indian software sector, but that was the focus of the study. However, proper caution is required before generalizing it to the other industries. The major challenge was the collection of data for the study. Since it is a negative concept, women employees are hesitant revealing the reasons and consequences. They are not willing to share their identity and name of their previous organization. We tried to bring out their emotions by positively wording our questions. However, this study is an attempt to reveal the silent but vigorous beliefs that are undermining women workforce attrition in Indian IT/ITES sector.

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Author Note

Sharda Singh is a research scholar at ICFAI Business School, Hyderabad in Human Resources and Organizational Behavior department. She has six years of teaching experience in the area of HR, OB and Statistics in various educational institutes. Her current research interest focuses on well-being, positive psychology, attrition, leadership and psychological hardiness. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: sharda.singh@ibsindia.org.

Dr. Shirshendu Ganguli is an Associate professor at T.A. Pai Management Institute, Karnataka in the marketing and Strategy department. Before that Ganguli has worked in several companies in the area of marketing and business development. His article have appeared in several national and international publications like *Marketing Management Journal*, *Managing Service Quality*, *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *Journal of Services Research*, *The Icfaian Journal of Management Research*, and *The IUP Journal of Business Strategy*. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: shirshenduganguli@tapmi.edu.in.

Rajasekhar David is a research scholar and teaching associate at IBS Hyderabad Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: rajasekhar.p@ibsindia.org.

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