



## Factors Influencing Women's Career Progression and Leadership Opportunities in the Corporate Sector

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**Abstract:** The fact that women are underrepresented in senior leadership roles continues in the knowledge-based industries even though the proportion of women in the workforce is increasing. This study looks at the organizational and work-related factors that are connected with women's progress in their careers and their access to leadership positions in the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector, an industry that is growing rapidly, has operations all over the world and generally has relatively progressive human resource practices. Based on Social Role Theory, the Glass Ceiling Perspective and Social Cognitive Career Theory, the study creates an integrated conceptual framework that connects eight organizational and work-related factors—organizational culture, leadership support, mentoring and sponsorship, training and leadership development, performance recognition, work–life balance, gender equality policies and gender bias—to women's career advancement and opportunities for leadership. A quantitative, cross-sectional research approach is suggested, with primary data to be gathered from 400 to 450 women employees in Indian IT companies, including multinational corporations, using a structured questionnaire. The data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. The research is expected to make its contribution to the existing literature by examining a number of factors related to organization, relationships, development and structure under one empirical approach and by providing evidence-based suggestions for human resource professionals and policy makers wishing to enhance women's career development and their presence at leadership positions. **Keywords:** women's career advancement; leadership possibilities; organizational culture; mentoring and sponsorship; gender equality; gender discrimination; Indian IT industry.

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### Introduction

The growing presence of women in the workplace is one of the significant trends that is seen today in modern organizations and economy. While the number of women in the workforce is rising, their access to managerial and executive jobs is not uniform. It has been found by scholars studying gender and leadership that women still face difficulties related to gender stereotypes, leadership traits, organizational processes, and career advancement opportunities. According to the theory of social role, gender-based expectations can impact how leadership competence is perceived as a result of the fact that leadership roles are traditionally associated with masculine traits (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The matter is especially pertinent in knowledge-based organizations where the number of professionals and female employees has risen tremendously yet representation among the top tier continues to be relatively low. Studies have noted ongoing barriers to the success of women in climbing up the corporate ladder in terms of organizational culture, gender biases, poor networking, and lack of equal developmental opportunities as well as challenges pertaining to managing work and family life (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2010).

The Indian Information Technology (IT) sector serves as a key example for the discussion of these problems. In the last three decades, the sector has witnessed tremendous growth and now serves as one of the largest employers of professionals. At the same time, the rising numbers of women in the sector have not resulted in equally proportional representation of women in high positions. According to recent statistics from the IT industry, about 36% of Indian technology professionals were women in the FY2025.

Based on the existing literature in the Indian IT sector, it is found that the career of women is connected to various organizational and familial factors. For instance, Chauhan et al. (2022) explored the role of mentoring, organizational support, and family involvement in connection to women's perceived career success in the Indian IT sector. The results obtained by these researchers have proved the importance of organizational and relational factors but have also shown the importance of considering other workplace characteristics. Furthermore, glass-ceiling barriers in the Indian IT industry that include organizational culture, socio-cultural factors, role conflict, and other organizational factors have been found out.

Therefore, career success cannot be described through one organizational factor. Organizational culture can impact the way women see their workplace, leadership support can help gain development opportunities and visibility, mentoring and sponsorship can provide career guidance and advocacy, training and leadership development can improve competencies, performance recognition can affect perception of fairness, work-life balance can facilitate career continuity, gender equality initiatives can provide organizational structures for equity, and gender bias can prevent career success.

Even though there is a growing amount of research on the subject matter, there is a need for an integrated empirical study of these issues within one framework which would take into consideration women's career progression and leadership development in modern India IT industry. Previous researches often used selected combinations of organizational, familial, or career-related issues as the focus point of their studies. This paper aims at extending previous literature by taking into account eight organizational and workplace issues that pertain to women's career advancement.

Therefore, the objective of the current study is to investigate the relationship between organizational culture, leadership support, mentoring and sponsorship, training and leadership development, performance recognition, work-life balance, gender equality policies, gender bias and women's career progression and leadership opportunities in the Indian IT sector.

This research is based on three complementary theoretical approaches – Social Role Theory, Glass Ceiling Perspective and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). All three theories give a multi-level explanation of women's advancement as they address gender role expectations, structural and contextual factors influencing career development.

## **Literature Review**

### **• Women's Career Progression in the Corporate Sector**

Career progression for women is an interesting subject for human resources management, organizational behavior, and gender studies researchers. Despite the progress made in terms of women's presence in the professional sphere of employment, women still make up a smaller portion than men in senior management roles and decision making positions.

Career progression is a process that includes advancement throughout the organizational hierarchy with increasing responsibility, developmental opportunities, and gaining more authority. Career progression is not simply about personal qualifications and performance of an employee. Career progression opportunities depend on organizational structure, workplace culture, leader behaviors, network opportunities, mentoring, development opportunities, and appraisal processes (Ibarra et al., 2010; Ely et al., 2011). This means that equal representation at entry and professional levels may not automatically ensure equality at senior level.

Gender stereotypes may further impact women's career success. According to Social Role Theory, the expectations of gender roles shape the perception of appropriate behavior and competence. Since the characteristics that define leadership roles are typically viewed as masculine, women may experience the incongruity between the gender role expectations and leadership role expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The Indian information technology industry is no exception as well since the findings about career success of women show that mentoring and other conditions within the organization play an essential role in their career success (Chauhan et al., 2022).

- **Leadership Opportunities for Women**

Leadership opportunities are defined as access to managerial responsibilities, strategic assignments, leadership training, and decision-making roles that allow for movement into higher-level management positions.

Although women have made progress in education and employment, they still experience difficulties when trying to gain access to leadership positions. As pointed out by Eagly and Karau (2002), the incongruence perception between the gender role of a woman and a leadership role is likely to create prejudice against women who aspire to become leaders and women who are in leadership positions.

Access to influential decision makers and organizational networks may also shape the leadership opportunities. According to Ibarra et al. (2010), in addition to formal qualifications, a person needs certain conditions that would include access to sponsors, networks, developmental assignments and visibility for effective career advancement.

Therefore, organizations which offer advancement opportunities, leadership development, mentoring, sponsorship and inclusive leadership are more likely to have equal access to leadership positions.

- **Organizational Culture and Career Progression**

Organizational culture includes shared values, norms, beliefs, and behavioral expectations that affect workplace experiences. Culture can promote or hinder women's career advancement.

Organizational cultures that foster inclusion through elements such as fairness, respect, cooperation, and equal opportunities can generate supportive environments for career development. On the other hand, organizational cultures where leaders embody masculine stereotypes, informal exclusion, or unequal access to networks may inhibit women's career progression.

According to Ely et al. (2011), organizational context matters in the development of women as leaders. Organizational culture can lend legitimacy to the aspirations of women who seek leadership positions and increase their access to developmental opportunities.

In the Indian IT context, organizational culture is especially significant since the industry is made up of professional human resource systems along with high work pressure and competitive career structures, and traditionally male leadership hierarchies.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Organizational culture is positively related to women's career development and leadership opportunities.

- **Leadership Support**

Leadership support is the degree to which managers and senior leaders provide motivation, direction, coaching, visibility, opportunities for development, and equal access to growth assignments.

Supportive leadership can assist employees in comprehending the expectations for advancement, getting feedback, acquiring competencies, and having access to organizational resources. It is especially important for women who might face barriers to advancement due to informal networks within organizations or stereotypes about gender.

In SCCT, the role of environmental support and barriers plays an essential role in career development (Lent et al., 1994).

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Leadership support is positively related to career progression and leadership opportunities for women.

- **Mentoring and Sponsorship**

Mentoring provides career guidance, advice, psychosocial support, feedback and opportunities for professional development. Sponsorship differs from mentoring because sponsors use their organizational influence to advocate for an employee and facilitate access to advancement opportunities.

Mentoring and sponsorship may be particularly important for women because access to influential networks and high-visibility assignments can affect career progression. Existing Indian IT research has demonstrated the relevance of mentoring to women's perceived career success and advancement (Chauhan et al., 2022).

However, mentoring and sponsorship should not be treated as identical mechanisms. Mentoring primarily provides guidance and development, whereas sponsorship involves active advocacy and organizational influence. Both mechanisms can contribute to career progression by increasing access to information, visibility, developmental opportunities and promotion pathways.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Mentoring and sponsorship are positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

- **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance concerns the extent to which employees can manage professional and personal responsibilities without excessive conflict. Flexible work arrangements, family-supportive practices, parental leave, childcare support and supportive supervisors can contribute to employees' ability to sustain their careers.

Research has demonstrated that employees' perceptions of family-supportive organizational environments are associated with work-family conflict, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover-related outcomes (Allen, 2001). A large meta-analysis by Kossek et al. (2011) similarly demonstrates the importance of workplace social support in relation to work-family conflict.

Because women continue to experience substantial family and caregiving responsibilities in many social contexts, work-life balance can have particular implications for career continuity and advancement. Supportive organizational practices may reduce barriers that otherwise contribute to career interruptions or reduced availability for advancement opportunities.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Work-life balance is positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

- **Training and Development**

Training and leadership development can strengthen technical, managerial, interpersonal and strategic capabilities required for career advancement. Leadership development may include formal training, executive coaching, cross-functional assignments, succession planning, stretch assignments and other developmental experiences.

Access to such opportunities is not necessarily distributed equally. If women receive fewer high-visibility assignments or have less access to developmental networks, formal equality in training provision may not translate into equal advancement.

Leadership development therefore represents both a competency-building mechanism and a potential pathway to organizational visibility.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Training and leadership development are positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

- **Performance Recognition**

Performance recognition concerns the extent to which employee contributions are evaluated and acknowledged fairly through appraisal, rewards, promotion and recognition systems.

Transparent performance criteria can improve perceptions of organizational justice and reduce opportunities for subjective judgments. Conversely, when evaluation criteria are ambiguous, gender stereotypes can affect perceptions of competence, leadership potential and suitability for promotion.

Fair recognition is therefore relevant to women's career progression because advancement depends not only on performance but also on how performance is evaluated and translated into organizational opportunities.

**H<sub>6</sub>:** Performance recognition is positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities

- **Gender Equality Policies**

Gender equality policies include organizational practices relating to equal opportunity, anti-discrimination, harassment prevention, equitable recruitment, promotion transparency, flexible working arrangements, leadership development and diversity and inclusion.

Formal policies can establish organizational expectations and accountability. However, the existence of a policy does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation. Leadership commitment, managerial behavior, communication, monitoring and accountability determine whether formal policies translate into meaningful organizational practice.

The effectiveness of gender equality policies should therefore be considered from the perspective of employees who experience their implementation in practice.

**H<sub>7</sub>:** Gender equality policies are positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

- **Gender Bias and the Glass Ceiling**

Gender bias refers to conscious or unconscious stereotypes, unequal treatment, discriminatory judgments, or assumptions about women's competence, commitment, leadership capability, or suitability for advancement.

The glass ceiling perspective describes invisible barriers that prevent qualified women from progressing to higher organizational levels. Such barriers may arise through informal networks, organizational culture, biased evaluation, unequal developmental opportunities and stereotypical perceptions of leadership.

Social Role Theory further confirms the importance of such mechanisms since if leadership positions are seen as positions that require traits stereotypically attributed to men, then women may be subject to increased scrutiny or negative evaluations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Also, recent findings related to the Indian IT industry suggest that the barriers to the glass ceiling are multifaceted, consisting of organization culture, socio-cultural barriers, role conflict, and other organizational factors.

Therefore, gender bias is the main negative influence in the context of the current study.

**H<sub>8</sub>:** Gender bias is negatively associated with women's career progress and leadership opportunities.

- **Summary of Literature**

The literature shows that women's career progress is affected by different organizational and contextual factors instead of being influenced only by individual competences. Organizational culture, organizational leadership, mentoring, development opportunities, work-life balance support, recognition, and gender equality can foster advancement, while gender bias can limit possibilities.

However, existing Indian IT research has often concentrated on selected combinations of factors. For example, Chauhan et al. (2022) examined mentoring, perceived organizational support and family responsibilities in relation to women's perceived career success. Another study of women in the Indian IT industry examined mentoring, organizational support and family responsibilities in relation to perceived career success and career advancement using EFA, CFA and path analysis.

Similarly, recent research on glass-ceiling barriers in the Indian IT industry has identified multiple dimensions of barriers but examined their relationship with work performance rather than directly modelling women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

The present study therefore addresses a more specific gap by integrating eight organizational and workplace factors within a single empirical framework focused on women's career progression and leadership opportunities. The framework combines cultural, relational, developmental, work-life, policy and structural dimensions and is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on Social Role Theory, the Glass Ceiling Perspective and Social Cognitive Career Theory. Each theory gives distinct explanatory dimension.

- **Social Role Theory**

Social Role Theory explains gender differences in behavior and social expectations through the distribution of men and women into different social roles (Eagly, 1987). Social roles generate expectations regarding appropriate behavior, which can subsequently influence perceptions and evaluations.

Leadership roles have historically been associated with agentic characteristics such as assertiveness, confidence and authority, whereas women have traditionally been stereotyped as more communal. The perceived mismatch between female gender roles and leadership roles can hence contribute to unfavorable estimations of women seeking leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Social Role Theory is relevant to this study because gender bias and organizational culture may reflect and reproduce gendered expectations regarding leadership suitability.

- **Glass Ceiling Perspective**

The glass ceiling perspective highlights invisible and informal barriers that restrict women's advancement to senior leadership despite qualifications and performance.

These barriers may include gender stereotypes, unequal access to networks, limited sponsorship, biased promotion practices, organizational cultures and exclusion from high-visibility assignments.

The concept remains useful as an organizational perspective for examining barriers to advancement, even though contemporary research increasingly recognizes that women's career paths may involve multiple barriers occurring at different stages rather than a single invisible barrier immediately below senior leadership.

Accordingly, this study uses the Glass Ceiling Perspective as a framework for examining structural and organizational constraints on advancement.

- **Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)**

Social Cognitive Career Theory explains career development through interactions among individual characteristics, learning experiences, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals and environmental conditions (Lent et al., 1994).

The theory is particularly relevant because career development does not occur independently of organizational context. Supportive leaders, mentors, training opportunities, recognition and inclusive policies can provide contextual resources, while discrimination and organizational barriers can constrain career development.

SCCT therefore provides the theoretical basis for examining organizational support mechanisms as contextual factors associated with women's career advancement.

- **Integration of the Theoretical Framework**

The three perspectives cannot substitute each other; they are complementary to each other.

Social Role Theory shows how gender stereotyping and social expectations could affect perceptions of women's suitability for leadership roles. Glass Ceiling Perspective is centered on the organizational and structural constraints that prevent women from advancing. SCCT demonstrates the interaction between environmental barriers and supports in the career development process.

All three theories together create a multi-level approach:

- Social expectations and gender stereotyping → organizational structures and work environment → career opportunities and experiences → career advancement and leadership opportunities.

This means that such organizational conditions as organizational culture, leader support, mentoring and sponsoring, training and leadership development, performance evaluation, work-life balance, and gender equality programs serve as supportive conditions, while gender bias is a potential barrier.

### **Research Gap**

Even though there is now an abundant amount of literature concerning women's careers and leadership, certain research lacunas exist.

First of all, the individual variables that are critical for career success (mentoring, organizational support, work-family and gender issues) have been extensively studied, however not always within the overall framework suggested by the current study.

Secondly, there are already certain findings within Indian IT industry literature about the impact of organizational and family factors on women's careers, however there is potential for further exploration of the combination of organizational culture, organizational support, mentoring, training and development, career rewards, work-life balance, gender equality and gender bias.

Finally, most often the prior literature has been interested in either career success, career advancement, organizational performance or barriers separately. Comparatively less attention has been given to an integrated framework examining career progression and access to leadership opportunities together.

Fourth, formal gender equality policies do not necessarily produce equivalent employee experiences. Employees' perceptions of policy implementation, leadership commitment, promotion transparency and organizational accountability therefore warrant greater empirical attention.

Finally, there is a need for contemporary empirical evidence from the Indian IT sector, where women's participation has increased substantially but senior leadership representation continues to be an important organizational challenge.

In response to these gaps, the present study proposes an integrated empirical framework examining eight organizational and workplace factors in relation to women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

### **Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

The conceptual framework proposes that women's career progression and leadership opportunities are associated with eight organizational and workplace factors.

#### **Independent Variables**

- Organizational Culture
- Leadership Support
- Mentoring and Sponsorship
- Training and Leadership Development
- Performance Recognition
- Work–Life Balance
- Gender Equality Policies
- Gender Bias

#### **Dependent Variable**

### **Women's Career Progression and Leadership Opportunities**

#### **Conceptual Relationship**

- Organizational Culture
- Leadership Support
- Mentoring and Sponsorship
- Training and Leadership Development
- Performance Recognition
- Work–Life Balance
- Gender Equality Policies
- Gender Bias

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Women's Career Progression and Leadership Opportunities

The first seven independent variables are hypothesized to have positive relationships with the dependent variable, whereas gender bias is hypothesized to have a negative relationship.

- **Operational Definitions**

- **Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture refers to the extent to which the organization promotes inclusion, fairness, equality, collaboration and a supportive environment for women's professional growth and advancement.

- **Leadership Support**

Leadership support refers to the degree to which supervisors and senior leaders provide encouragement, guidance, feedback, visibility, developmental opportunities and equitable access to career-enhancing assignments.

- **Mentoring and Sponsorship**

Mentoring and sponsorship refer to access to career guidance, professional advice, developmental relationships, advocacy, promotion support and opportunities for leadership exposure.

- **Training and Leadership Development**

Training and leadership development refer to organizational initiatives that strengthen technical, managerial, strategic and leadership capabilities through formal and informal learning opportunities.

- **Performance Recognition**

Performance recognition refers to the fairness and transparency with which employee contributions are evaluated, acknowledged, rewarded and considered in promotion and advancement decisions.

- **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance refers to the availability and effectiveness of organizational practices that enable employees to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal and family commitments.

- **Gender Equality Policies**

Gender equality policies refer to organizational policies and practices designed to promote equal opportunity, diversity, inclusion, anti-discrimination, fair recruitment, transparent promotion and equitable career development.

- **Gender Bias**

Gender bias refers to conscious or unconscious stereotypes, discriminatory practices, unequal treatment, or gender-based assumptions that negatively affect women's professional development, advancement, or access to leadership.

- **Women's Career Progression and Leadership Opportunities**

Women's career progression and leadership opportunities refer to women's perceived access to promotion, increased responsibility, leadership development, strategic assignments, decision-making roles and advancement within their organizations.

- **Proposed Hypotheses**

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Organizational culture is positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>2</sub>:** Leadership support is positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>3</sub>:** Mentoring and sponsorship are positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>4</sub>:** Training and leadership development are positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>5</sub>:** Performance recognition is positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>6</sub>:** Work-life balance is positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>7</sub>:** Gender equality policies are positively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.
- H<sub>8</sub>:** Gender bias is negatively associated with women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

## Research Methodology

### • Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive and explanatory research design to examine the relationships between organizational and workplace factors and women's career progression and leadership opportunities in the Indian IT sector.

A quantitative design enables the relationships among the study variables to be examined statistically using standardized survey measures. The cross-sectional design involves collecting data from respondents at a single point in time.

Because the design is cross-sectional, the study examines associations rather than causal effects.

### • Research Approach

The study follows a deductive research approach. The hypotheses are derived from established theoretical perspectives and previous empirical literature and are tested using quantitative survey data.

The theoretical framework combines Social Role Theory, the Glass Ceiling Perspective and Social Cognitive Career Theory.

### • Population and Sampling

The target population comprises women employees working in IT organizations operating in India. The population includes employees working in multinational corporations, large Indian IT organizations, medium-sized enterprises and emerging technology firms.

The study seeks representation across different organizational levels, including entry-level, professional, middle-management, senior-management and executive positions.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique is adopted because the study requires respondents with direct experience of organizational practices, career progression, leadership opportunities and gender-related workplace conditions.

#### Inclusion Criteria

Respondents should:

- identify as women;
- be currently employed in an IT organization operating in India;
- have sufficient organizational experience to evaluate workplace and career-development practices; and
- voluntarily consent to participate.

### • Sample Size

A target sample of 400–450 respondents is proposed.

The final minimum sample requirement should be established through a priori power analysis based on the number of predictors, anticipated effect size, significance level and desired statistical power.

The final manuscript should report the actual number of valid responses and the power-analysis assumptions used.

### • Sources of Data

The study uses both primary and secondary data.

Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire administered to women employees in Indian IT organizations.

Secondary data are obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, government publications, industry reports, organizational reports, conference proceedings and publications of relevant international organizations.

Secondary sources are used to establish the theoretical foundation, contextual background and empirical basis of the study.

- **Research Instrument**

Primary data are collected using a structured questionnaire developed through a review of literature relating to women's career progression, leadership development, organizational culture, mentoring, work–life balance, performance recognition, gender equality and gender bias.

The questionnaire consists of the following broad sections:

- Section A: Demographic and employment profile
- Section B: Women's career progression and leadership opportunities
- Section C: Organizational culture
- Section D: Leadership support
- Section E: Mentoring and sponsorship
- Section F: Training and leadership development
- Section G: Performance recognition
- Section H: Work–life balance
- Section I: Gender equality policies
- Section J: Gender bias
- Section K: Policy advocacy and organizational commitment, where applicable

Likert-scale items are measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Where appropriate, demographic and employment questions use categorical response options.

- **Measurement of Variables**

The study examines eight independent variables:

- organizational culture;
- leadership support;
- mentoring and sponsorship;
- training and leadership development;
- performance recognition;
- work–life balance;
- gender equality policies; and
- gender bias.

The dependent construct is women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

Each construct is measured using multiple items derived from relevant literature and adapted to the Indian IT context. The wording of adapted items should be reviewed for contextual appropriateness and content validity before final administration.

- **Data Collection Procedure**

The questionnaire is distributed electronically to eligible women employees working in Indian IT organizations.

Participation is voluntary. Respondents are provided with information about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire.

No personally identifiable information is required for participation. Responses are treated confidentially and analyzed in aggregate form.

- **Reliability and Validity**

Internal consistency reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A coefficient of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for established scales, although interpretation also considers the number of items and theoretical coherence of the construct.

Construct validity is assessed through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

The suitability of data for factor analysis is assessed using:

- the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy; and
- Bartlett's Test of Sphericity.

Factor extraction and rotation procedures are selected according to the characteristics of the data and theoretical structure of the constructs. Factor loadings, cross-loadings, explained variance and conceptual interpretability are considered when evaluating the factor structure.

Content validity is supported through a review of established literature and, where feasible, expert evaluation of the questionnaire items.

- **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data are analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The following statistical procedures are proposed:

- **Descriptive Statistics**

Frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation are used to summarize respondent characteristics and responses.

- **Reliability Analysis**

Cronbach's alpha is used to evaluate internal consistency.

- **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

EFA is used to examine the underlying factor structure of the questionnaire and assess construct validity.

- **Pearson Correlation**

Pearson correlation coefficients are used to examine the direction and strength of relationships among the study variables.

- **Multiple Linear Regression**

Multiple linear regression is used to examine the combined association between the eight independent variables and women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

The regression model may be expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OC + \beta_2 LS + \beta_3 MS + \beta_4 TLD + \beta_5 PR + \beta_6 WLB + \beta_7 GEP + \beta_8 GB + \varepsilon$$

where:

- Y = Women's Career Progression and Leadership Opportunities
- OC = Organizational Culture
- LS = Leadership Support
- MS = Mentoring and Sponsorship
- TLD = Training and Leadership Development
- PR = Performance Recognition
- WLB = Work-Life Balance
- GEP = Gender Equality Policies
- GB = Gender Bias
- $\beta_0$  = Intercept
- $\beta_1$ – $\beta_8$  = Regression coefficients
- $\varepsilon$  = Error term

Before interpreting the regression model, relevant assumptions should be assessed, including linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, independence of observations and multicollinearity.

Regression results should be reported using the model's  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ , F statistic, standardized coefficients, significance levels and appropriate confidence intervals.

**Group Comparisons**

Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA may be conducted where theoretically justified to examine differences in perceptions across relevant demographic or employment groups, such as age, experience, education and organizational level.

Statistical significance is evaluated at the 5% level ( $p < .05$ ).

- **Ethical Considerations**

The study follows established research-ethics principles.

Participation is voluntary and informed consent is obtained from respondents before participation. Respondents are informed about the purpose of the study and the intended academic use of the data.

Anonymity and confidentiality are ensured. Personal identification data will be collected only when strictly necessary.

Participants can leave the study at any time without facing any consequences. All data collected will be kept secure and analyzed only in aggregate form.

**Anticipated Theoretical and Practical Contribution**

The study will contribute to the literature in three main ways.

Firstly, by combining the concepts of Social Role Theory, the Glass Ceiling Perspective, and Social Cognitive Career Theory, to offer complementary explanations for women's career advancement. Social Role Theory explains gender-based expectations, Glass Ceiling Perspective explains organizational obstacles and SCCT explains contextual support and constraints in career advancement.

Secondly, by integrating eight organizational and workplace factors into one empirical framework. These factors include culture-related, relational, developmental, work-life, policy, and structural aspects of women's career advancement.

Finally, the study examines women employees in the Indian Information Technology Industry sector and hence will make a contribution in a context-specific way in a knowledge-based sector where there has been an increase in women's workforce participation but not in their leadership positions.

In terms of practicality, the results obtained will help HR practitioners and organizational leaders determine the work environment that is conducive for women's career development.

To policy makers, the study can provide evidence to support organizational gender equality initiatives and policies aimed at promoting women's involvement and advancement in professional and leadership positions.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are certain limitations to the study conducted.

First, the cross-sectional design is capable only of capturing the perceptions of the respondents at one point of time, hence does not determine causality.

Secondly, non-probability purposive sampling used in the study may hinder the ability to generalize the results for all women working in the Indian IT industry.

Thirdly, the study is mainly based on perceptions which are subject to response bias or social desirability bias.

Fourth, the study is specific to the Indian IT industry. While it could have some relevance to other knowledge intensive industries, the generalization from the results to other industries or countries requires careful consideration.

Lastly, the study looks into certain organizational and workplace factors, and not all of them affecting career progression of women, such as personality traits, family structure, economic background, organization size, or leadership practices within different industries.

**Future Research**

Future research could make use of longitudinal design and look into changes in women's career progression over time, thus providing better support for the temporal relationship.

Comparative research could investigate differences between IT industry and other knowledge intensive industries, as well as differences between organizations in India and organizations in other countries.

Future studies could also examine whether organizational factors operate differently across career stages and organizational levels.

Further research could investigate mediating or moderating mechanisms, including career self-efficacy, leadership aspirations, organizational identification, perceived organizational support, or work–family conflict.

Qualitative studies could complement survey-based research by exploring women's lived experiences of promotion, sponsorship, leadership access, organizational culture and gender bias.

### Conclusion

Women's increasing participation in professional employment has not automatically resulted in equivalent representation in organizational leadership. The persistence of gender disparities suggests that women's career progression is shaped by a combination of organizational, relational, developmental, work–life, policy and structural conditions.

This study develops an integrated framework examining eight factors—organizational culture, leadership support, mentoring and sponsorship, training and leadership development, performance recognition, work–life balance, gender equality policies and gender bias—in relation to women's career progression and leadership opportunities in the Indian IT sector.

The combination of Social Role Theory, Glass Ceiling Perspective and Social Cognitive Career Theory provides an elaborate and multivariate theoretical base for understanding the interaction of gender norms, organizational constraints and contextual career support mechanisms.

The suggested research framework is supposed to generate some evidence on the organizational and work place conditions that have the greatest impact on women's career development. The obtained evidence will be useful for organizations in taking steps from their formal statements about gender equality to actual career support for women.

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