

# Understanding Social Support Network of Women in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Sector.

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**Abstract:** The changing aspects of personal, family, socio-economic, and career advancement with regard to Social support were analyzed from 503 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) women professionals, from 12 various ICT organizations from Bengaluru, India. ICT industry remains to be the major private sector employer in India for women and this number was all set to increase in the future. The characteristics of the ICT industry in India and the nature of the work pose some unique challenges for women professionals in the industry. This study focuses on how the social support related factors influence women professionals. Do these women perceive the social support as a blessing? It was very obvious that career oriented women have to manage / balance work & life due to stereotypic roles played. Women professionals have agreed that their career advancement was influenced by the support they got from their managers, co-workers, family and organization. The study found that age was one among the several factors affecting their adjustment into society. The higher the age, the mature were women and very adapting to the society. For some women the factors created positive attributions, but paradoxically, for others, the same factors created negative attributions in various forms related with co- workers. Though women wanted and wished this blessing of social support in their daily routine, it was a reality that there was a struggle to get that blessing in place for all the 503 women, we interacted. The percentages of blessings varied and the study proved that there was a significant adaptability required, in order to get this social support from all angles. The study denoted a very high significant relationship between Social support and factors such as., age, income, qualification of the spouse and self, working hours, gender affect, marital status and career advancement. When there was no support from the family, the individual encountered difficulties of managing home and work effectively. The researcher also had made certain recommendations that could help women sail through the issues of social support such as developing an extensive network, identifying a mentor and coach for self, plan by being proactive, knowledge acquisition, enjoying life and giving importance to self and ask for help and support when in need.

## Keywords:

Social Support, Women, ICT Sector, Women Professionals.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is the World's largest destination for sourcing in the IT sector with direct employment of 3.7 million people by the IT industry. The report had also mentioned that with industry hiring models expected to change, the next USD 100 billion revenues would require 1.2-2 million professionals. In India the technology and the BPM sectors that generated revenues approximately around US\$ 160 billion during Financial Year 2016 compared to US\$ 146.5 billion in Financial Year 2015, implying a growth rate of 9.2 percent. This was the indication that the market was fairly competitive from articles and reports released by NASSCOM-2016. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution has paved new opportunities for social development and economic growth but has also posed problems and challenges. It can shape and enhance wide range of developmental applications in agriculture, industry and social sectors and is influencing all sections of the society. ICT provides unique opportunities for women development.

"Women still face a glass ceiling on the top" i.e. the invisible barriers, generally artificial, that prevent qualified individuals especially women, from advancing within their organizations and reaching their full potential. Social support was offers to an individual an enjoyment of love, support and attention of family members, friends, co-workers, institutions, head and other people, which consequently provides higher level of satisfaction with their work. The supportive family and work environment gives the employees a balanced work attitude, subsequently enhances the quality of work. The proposed study was an attempt to find out and weigh the social support factors that would help women reach higher career levels in line with their expectations in 12 IT/ITES Organizations at Bengaluru. This paper focuses on the factors that support women socially.

## WOMEN & ICT

Women of the early centuries were limited to their kitchens and were employed in factories, farms or shop. Very few women had the access to higher education and they were forced to be at the mercy of their father's or husband's attitudes towards women and work. The fast developing knowledge economy provided the education and empowerment with robust careers. With brain power being the requisite skill in this knowledge era, rather than physical strength or fortitude, the women workers seem to flood into every industry on par with men. But this has become hard-hitting challenge for women as they have to perform a lot of duties in home and office. As working women get married, they have additional responsibilities and when they become mothers, they have to manage the primary care of children and extended family and were thus, under greater pressure to continue on a career path. Working mothers of today fulfil family responsibilities and also try to remain fully involved in their careers coping up with the competing demands of their multiple roles. The caring responsibilities that working mothers have, lays heavy stress on them when it is combined with their professional duties. The attempt of working women to integrate, organize and balance the various problems and activities in their different roles simultaneously puts them under tremendous pressure.

In India, women are now occupying significant positions in the IT labour force in India. The number of software professionals was increased from 6800 in 1985 to 650,000 in 2003 to 2004 and further to 2.23 million in 2008 (NASSCOM, 2009). Women are employed in IT companies located mainly in cities as Bengaluru, Poona, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bombay (now Mumbai), and Kolkata. More women are employed in Southern regions of the country. They belong to the younger age group. Although women are expected to contribute around one third of the labour force, they represent only one section of the Indian society because they are expected to take care of the family as well - which is hampering the work-life balance of the women.

## II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was, to identify and analyze the social support factors influencing the career progression of women in ICT sector, to achieve challenging and or developmental career opportunities. Though most of the ICT companies employ women, very few women were able to reach the top of the career ladder and very few were able to understand as to what social support system they require to achieve what they want.

Nielsen & Hellens (2006) indicate that in Australia, 'the IT industry appears to be constructed as a masculinized domain, unattractive to most women and many men'. According to Von Hellens & Nielsen (2006), women in Australia were not only in a minority but also were overrepresented in jobs that tend to have lower formal qualifications, were at the lower level and lower skilled jobs. Also, 'there was income disparities between men and women with women concentrated in lower income occupations' (Staehr Byrne & Bell, 2006 p. 467).

In India, women's participations in the IT field were low, despite the growth in the IT sector. For example, in 2000, women constitute 30% of the IT work force in India (Muthumani & Saranya, 2014). The IT industry was one of the important components of the Indian economy and as a market in the world, generates billions of dollars through IT services, such as software development and business process outsourcing. Muthumani & Saranya (2014) also mention that job opportunities in the field of information technology created a job demand rivalled all others in the history of the Indian labour force, and also that 'India had the largest population of employed women and the largest number of certified women professionals in information technology, finance, and healthcare services just after the USA'. However, women in India were still underrepresented in the IT field and some efforts have been made by the government to recruit and retain more women in IT.

Rose and Campbell (2010) conducted a study of women in abusive associations, social support and close intimate relations may be life-threatening to the effective firmness of the exploitation. Efforts to enhance ill-treated women's support must be grounded on an understanding of women's perceptions of effective support and the constraints they experience to seeking support. In this paper they presented findings from a qualitative analysis of semi structured interviews with 31 women who were in abusive relationships. The women were interviewed three times over two and-a-half years. Results of the analysis included that women used female friends for support more often than family members, and that women were constrained from seeking support by (a) cultural and social authorizations against leaving the association; (b) a design of thoughtfulness in relating to others or falsifying new relations; and (c) forced separation/seeing identity as isolative. Relationships with family members, especially parents, were not constantly seen as useful bases of support.

Social support had been shown to have an influential inspiration on how we reply to danger (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In everyday life, studies have found that people with spouses, friends, and family members who can provide emotional and quantifiable resources have better mental and physical health (Barth, Schneider, & von Känel, 2010; Pinquart & Duberstein, 2010). The whole purpose of this research was to investigate, explore, evaluate, and emphasize the difficulties that stunts women's progression due to the social support factors and also understand the influences of social support system. By exposing the prevalent flaws in the system and spotlighting the needs for change, these imbalances can be effectively alleviated and merit will become the sole criteria for the upward movement of people in any organization.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

This study was based on explanatory research design. It was basically empirical in nature, based on primary and secondary data. Secondary data were gathered from published documents such as journals and documents related to gender, society and ICT industry. Bengaluru is the capital and primary administrative, traditional, cultural and high tech industrial city of Karnataka – a state in Southern India which covers nearly 2190 square kilometres. It was India's fifth largest city in terms of population. The population of this study had been defined as ICT Women working at Bengaluru in different ICT Multi National Companies or Indian Companies.

The Researcher adopted multistage random sampling technique to determine the sample frame and selected 24 organizations which employed not less than 30,000 employees with 25% of women as the first stage of sample selection. In the second stage, the researcher selected 12 out of 24 organizations by using lottery method. The identification of women (83,843) at different levels such as 58,418 at the entry level, 17,525 at managerial levels, 7,900 at senior manager level in the 12 organizations was considered as third stage of sampling. The researcher decided to choose 0.6% (503) of women as a sample out of 83,848 as the fourth stage of sample selection using systematic random sampling technique. Hence the sampling size considered for this study was 503.

The Karasek's (1981) social support scale was adopted by adding eight items of family support component. The questionnaire was drafted into three aspects such as personal, professional and career development aspects. The perceived level of career development support was drafted, with the parameters of Social Support (co-worker support, manager, organization and family support).

The study involved the measurement of ICT women professionals in the personal environment and working environment. The framework of the study focused on the Social Support (co-worker support, manager, organization and family support), among the ICT women professionals. Hence the data were collected from women that were working in the information and communication technology industries. The primary data was collected, to suit the specified objectives of the study by using a structured questionnaire and the qualitative information was acquired through focus group discussions and informal discussions, with the ICT women professionals, during March to June, 2015.

#### **V. FINDINGS**

##### **Demographic Status**

The sample size of ICT Women professionals was 503, out of which majority of them fell into the age group of below 35 years. 43.1% were married, 1.6% was widow / separated and 55.3% were unmarried. 75% of them were Hindus. Most of the ICT Women professionals have qualification of Graduation level and above. i.e. Graduation 54.3%, Post-Graduation 42.9%. Majority of them belong to South India i.e. 86.5% (with the distribution of 50.9% from Karnataka, 16.7% from Tamil Nadu, 9.6% from Andhra Pradesh and 9.3% from Kerala) and 13.5% from the rest of India. 34.2% have specialized in Information Technology, 24.3% in Research & Development. 41.5% in other areas such as HR & Admin, Finance & Accounting and Sales & Marketing.

##### **Family Status**

ICT Women (i.e. 85.5%) belong to nuclear family, within which 76.5% stay with less than 4 in family. 55.3% of them were unmarried. I.e. Among the married, 15.1% have their spouse from the same profession and thus discloses that 90.5% belong to the "dual job" families. The spouse also earns from Rs. 50,000 - Rs.1, 00,000 pm and above, in that most of them fall into upper-middle class income group. It reveals that, 25.2% of the spouses of ICT women professionals were post graduates working in the MNC's. Whereas 13.7% of the ICT women respondents do not have a child and 22.1% have only one child. This denotes the clear planning of ICT women in managing their career.

##### **Professional Status**

Out of ICT Women professionals 35.6% of were Software Engineers, 31.4% were into IT Operations, 26.8% were Executives or Associates, 4.2% were into the Senior Manager positions. 65.4% of women worked 8-10 hours per day and 5% of them worked above 12 hours per day. 13.2% worked beyond 12 hours and some of them available on-call duty also. With regard to distance between work place, 28.6% of them traveled 5-10 kilo meters and 6.6% of them traveled 20-25 kilo meters. To look at the ICT Women professionals' mode of travel to the work place, 28.8% of them traveled by bus and 21.3% of them by two wheelers.

##### **Association of Social Support and the Independent Variables**

Age was a very important influencing factor of the overall significance of the social support ( $0.00 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ), with more number of years of age. The result showed that there was significance interference between Social support and Age of the women professionals. For some women, the factors created positive attributions, but paradoxically, for others, the same factors created negative attributions in various forms such as related with co-workers, Family, and Social support have very high significance but it was also found that there was no significance related with Organization of ICT women professionals. Spouse income was very much

help in family ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ) but had significance when a working woman earned more or else, there was a negative impact on women professionals. If a woman was married, we measured whether her spouse also worked in the same field and the share of the family's income from her earnings as indirect measures of spousal support. The study further reveals that there was significance interference between social support and gender effect for the ICT women professionals. Social support had also been defined as the physical and emotional comfort by family, manager, co-worker and organization.

There was overall significance between the marital status and social support ( $0.00 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ). The support network has severe consequences for the psychological well-being of women. Whereas facilities provided by the organization for women such as crèche, day care, cab facilities, maternity leaves and paid leaves, facilitates her to stay after office hours. The study revealed that there was an overall significance between the working hours and social support with more support on round-the-clock service hours of working and social support ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ). The results related with the Co-workers, who guided women that wanted to get ahead from work when in need of emergency they were not helpful and in case of health and any other assignment, managers were not supportive. But organization provided late night cab facilities and security for the women who were working late hours. Married women expressed that they were not able to work late hours because of family responsibilities and children when compared to unmarried women and were less preferred. Overall women working late hours and coming late to house created negative impact of on women by the society.

The study denotes an overall significance between the significant events and social support ( $0.00 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ). Career growth in an organization ( $0.180 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ) had no significance because many organizations were providing certain months of paid or unpaid leaves for marriage and child birth. While working with co-workers and managers' women were unable to do certain job they were not helpful, sometimes women decided to resign their job(s). The result showed that there was significance interference between Social support and Career advancement of ICT women professionals ( $0.002 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ) ( $0.409 < 0.05$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ). As per the data it was shared that factors that pushed female employees away from the field including exclusionary culture, inflexible work environments, isolation of women, and the failure of high-tech corporations in identifying the preference of women. Many women managers shared that their preference and involvement were very low when compared to men due to support from the organisation.

## **VI. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Though women wanted and wished this blessing of social support in their daily routine, it was a reality that there was struggle to get that blessing in place for all the women we interacted. The percentages of support varied and the study proved that there was a significant adaptability to be embraced in order to get this social support from all angles. The study found that age was one among the several factors affecting their adjustment into society. The higher the age the mature were women and very adapting to the society. For some women, the factors created positive attributions, but paradoxically, for others, the same factors created negative attributions in various forms such as related with co-workers. They did not have a smooth relationship.

The study showed the nature of specific strains and stresses among married women in their marital, occupational and house work roles were lower in family roles than in occupational. It was discovered that factors that pushed female employees away from the field including exclusionary culture, inflexible work environments, isolation of women, and the failure of high-tech corporations to identify preference of women. It was shared that spouse had been supportive. The spouse education and qualification are the internal resources giving the women some leverage in decreasing the traditional specialization between them regarding the decision making process.

The women had enclosed their significant events as marriage and child birth where they were not able to continue their career and personal aspirations. Spouse income seems to be great support for the family. Married women, with Children were not able to work late hours because of family responsibilities when compared to single women. Some women shared that they were getting full support from their family and husband which was very important and were able to manage the work and family concurrently.

A focussed group discussion was also added to understand the factors promoting the social support of women. The women shared that there was excellent support in the joint family system provided the maternal side was living close by. Women also shared that there was limited support from parents' in-law which also symbolised our Indian culture. The group discussion revealed that women from ICT have been inspired by three major persons – parents (father and mother) and husband. 4 out of 5 women believe that their inspiration had been their parents, they have always been encouraged, motivated, supported. Women believe that their parents have

been an inspiration to them in all ways. 1 out of 5 women had been getting full support from their husband and had been getting encouragement for being independent and having career.

Women shared that they could ask for emotional support, such as talking over problems or helping make difficult decisions. Though 70% were affirmative, more than half (55 percent) said they could have used at least a little more emotional support. Robust social support can actually make you able to cope with difficulties on your own, by improving your self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Some people find companionship among just a handful of people, be it their co-workers, managers or friends from their organisations and / or from family. It was very interesting to hear “we don’t need a huge network of friends and family to benefit from social support, it was a boon to have a social support and it’s possible to falsify new connections to reap the benefits of a healthy support network”.

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