

Strategic HR Practices for Sustaining Women Employees Across Life Stages: Creating Inclusive Workplaces.

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Abstract

This study examines strategic Human Resource (HR) practices that support women employees across different life stages in Indian organizations. With increasing emphasis on diversity and inclusion, organizations face challenges in retaining women during key transitions such as early career, motherhood, and mid-career advancement. Using data from 460 women employees across industries, the study applies chi-square and t-test analyses to evaluate the impact of HR interventions—flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and career development initiatives—on retention, job satisfaction, and engagement. The findings indicate that inclusive, life-stage-sensitive HR practices significantly enhance retention rates, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction. Flexible work policies and structured mentorship programs emerge as critical drivers of employee engagement and reduced attrition. The study offers actionable recommendations for designing inclusive and sustainable workplaces that address the evolving needs of women employees in India.

Keywords: Women employees; life stages; strategic HR practices; inclusive workplaces; retention; India; career development

Introduction

Women constitute a significant proportion of the global workforce; however, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, particularly in the Indian context. The retention of women employees is often influenced by life-stage-specific challenges, including work–family balance, maternity and childcare responsibilities, and limited career progression during mid-career stages. These challenges contribute to higher attrition rates and hinder long-term career advancement. Strategic human resource (HR) practices—such as flexible work arrangements, mentoring initiatives, diversity and inclusion programs, and structured career development opportunities—play a critical role in addressing these barriers. In this context, the present study examines the effectiveness of such HR practices in sustaining women employees across different life stages within Indian organizations, with a focus on enhancing retention, engagement, and career progression.

Importance of the Study

This study provides empirical insights into strategic human resource (HR) practices that enhance the retention of women employees and reduce attrition in organizational settings. It identifies key life-stage-specific challenges faced by women in India and evaluates the effectiveness of organizational interventions in addressing these barriers. Furthermore, the study offers evidence-based recommendations for designing and implementing inclusive workplace policies that support women's long-term career sustainability. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing efforts toward gender equality and workforce diversity in India by aligning organizational practices with broader socio-economic and policy objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the influence of human resource (HR) practices on women employees' retention.
- To analyse the impact of HR practices on women employees' engagement.
- To assess the effect of HR practices on women employees' job satisfaction.

Hypotheses (Alternative)

- **H1:** There is a significant influence between Human resource (HR) practices and women employees' retention.
- **H2:** There is a significant influence between Human resource (HR) practices and women employees' engagement.
- **H3:** There is a significant influence between Human resource (HR) practices and women employees' job satisfaction.

Methodology

- This study employs a descriptive and analytical cross-sectional design to examine the impact of HR practices on women employees across life stages in Indian organizations.
- The population includes women employees across multiple sectors, with a stratified random sample of 460 respondents ensuring representation across industries and career stages.
- Data were collected via a structured questionnaire covering HR practices, retention, engagement, and job satisfaction.
- Statistical analyses included chi-square tests to examine associations between HR practices and retention, t-tests and ANOVA to compare engagement and satisfaction across life stages, and regression analysis to measure the impact of HR practices on retention.
- This approach provides a robust framework for evaluating life-stage-sensitive HR interventions and their influence on women's career sustainability.

Limitations

- The use of self-reported data may introduce response bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings.
- The cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish long-term causal relationships between HR practices and employee outcomes.
- The study focuses exclusively on Indian companies, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other national or cultural contexts.
- Non-responses from certain industries could slightly affect the representativeness of the sample.

Review of Literature

1. **Sharma & Gupta (2022):** This study investigated the impact of flexible work arrangements on women employees in Indian IT firms. The findings indicate that policies such as work-from-home options, flexible hours, and part-time schedules significantly enhance retention by helping women balance professional and personal responsibilities. The authors highlight that organizations adopting flexible work strategies reported lower attrition rates and higher engagement among women staff.
2. **Rao et al. (2023):** This research examined the role of mentoring and career counseling programs in supporting mid-career women. Results show that structured mentorship, career guidance, and skill development initiatives significantly improve career satisfaction and professional growth opportunities. The study emphasizes that targeted interventions for mid-career employees help in overcoming stagnation and sustaining long-term organizational commitment.
3. **Singh & Verma (2022):** This study explored the relationship between inclusive HR policies and employee attrition across manufacturing and service sectors in India. The authors found that organizations implementing diversity and inclusion practices, equal opportunity initiatives, and supportive workplace policies experienced lower turnover among women employees. Inclusive HR strategies were shown to enhance job satisfaction and foster a more committed workforce.
4. **Kumar et al. (2023):** The study focused on life-stage-specific HR interventions such as extended maternity leave, childcare support, and returnship programs for women employees. Findings suggest that these targeted measures

improve organizational commitment and engagement, particularly for women navigating career breaks. The authors recommend integrating life-stage-sensitive policies into broader HR frameworks to sustain workforce participation and reduce attrition.

Conceptual frame work

HR Practices	Employee Outcomes	Life Stage
Flexible Work	Retention	Early, Mid, Late Career
Mentorship & Sponsorship	Engagement	Moderating Effect
Career Development.	Job Satisfaction	
Life-Stage Policies		

The conceptual framework delineates how strategic HR practices shape key employee outcomes for women across career life stages in Indian organizations. Practices such as flexible work arrangements, structured mentorship and sponsorship, career development initiatives, and life-stage-specific policies are posited to enhance retention, engagement, and job satisfaction. Importantly, the framework positions life stage (early, mid, late career) as a moderating factor, reflecting that the impact of HR interventions varies with career-stage-specific challenges. By integrating these dynamics, the framework offers a holistic, actionable blueprint for designing inclusive, life-stage-sensitive HR strategies that foster women's sustained career growth and strengthen organizational commitment.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Sample Distribution

Table-1: Sample Distribution by Life Stage

Life Stage	Age Range (Years)	Sample Size
Early Career	20–30	150
Mid-Career	31–40	180
Late Career	41–55	130
Total	—	460

Interpretation: From the table-1, The sample of 460 women employees is distributed across three life stages: (31–40 years, 180 respondents). The distribution ensures meaningful comparisons across all life stages while emphasizing the mid-career stage as a critical focus area for HR interventions.

t-Test: Engagement by Life Stage

Life Stage Comparison	Mean Engagement	t-statistic	p-value	Result (H ₀)
Early vs Mid	3.87 vs 3.45	3.12	0.002	Reject
Mid vs Late	3.45 vs 3.92	-2.78	0.006	Reject

Interpretation:

Engagement differs across career stages: early- ($M = 3.87$) and late-career women ($M = 3.92$) are more engaged than mid-career women ($M = 3.45$; $p < 0.01$).

Practical Implication:

HR strategies should target mid-career women to boost engagement across all life stages.

Statistical Analysis Table

Chi-Square Test: HR Practices vs Retention

HR Practice	Chi-Square	df	p-value	Result (H ₀)
Flexible Work	22.48	8	0.004	Reject
Mentorship	18.76	8	0.016	Reject
Career Progression	12.34	8	0.134	Accept

Interpretation:

Flexible work arrangements ($\chi^2 = 22.48, p = 0.004$) and mentorship programs ($\chi^2 = 18.76, p = 0.016$) are significantly associated with women’s retention, while career progression initiatives ($\chi^2 = 12.34, p = 0.134$) show no direct effect.

Practical Implication:

Organizations should prioritize **flexible work policies and structured mentorship** to retain women employees, with career progression supported through complementary HR measures.

Hypothesis Testing: H₂ – Effect of HR Practices on Engagement

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Test Statistic	df	p-value	Result (H ₀)
H ₂ : HR practices → Engagement	ANOVA	5.12	2	0.004	Reject

Interpretation:

ANOVA results ($F = 5.12, p = 0.004$) show that HR practices significantly affect women employees’ engagement, with higher engagement observed among those benefiting from flexible work, mentorship, and career development initiatives.

Practical Implication:

Life-stage-sensitive HR strategies enhance motivation, commitment, and active participation, making them essential for sustaining engagement in the workforce.

Hypothesis Testing: H₃ – Effect of HR Practices on Satisfaction

HR Outcome	Statistical Test	Test Statistic	df	p-value	Result (H ₀)
Satisfaction	t-test	3.87	458	0.000	Reject

Interpretation:

The t-test ($t = 3.87, p = 0.000$) shows HR practices significantly enhance women employees’ job satisfaction.

Practical Implication:

Life-stage-sensitive HR strategies improve satisfaction, supporting retention, engagement, and workforce stability.

Hypothesis Testing

Alternative Hypothesis	Test Used	Test Statistic	p-value	Accept/Reject Null Hypothesis(H ₀)
H1: HR practices → retention	Chi-square	28.56	0.001	H ₀ Reject
H2: HR practices → engagement	ANOVA	5.12	0.004	H ₀ Reject

H3: HR practices → satisfaction	t-test	3.87	0.000	H₀ Reject
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Interpretation: Strategic HR practices significantly affect retention, engagement, and satisfaction of women employees across life stages.

Novelty of the study: This study makes a significant contribution by examining women employees across multiple industries and different career life stages, including early, mid, and late career. Unlike previous research that often focuses on a single sector or career stage, this study provides a holistic perspective on how strategic HR practices—such as flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and life-stage-specific interventions—impact retention, engagement, and job satisfaction. By integrating cross-industry data with life-stage-sensitive analysis, the study offers comprehensive and evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of inclusive HR strategies in the Indian organizational context, highlighting actionable implications for policymakers and HR practitioners.

Findings

- Flexible work arrangements and mentorship programs are the most impactful HR practices.
- Retention challenges peak during mid-career (age 31-40), aligning with family responsibilities.
- Life-stage-targeted interventions significantly enhance employee satisfaction and engagement.
- Companies with inclusive policies report lower attrition rates and higher organizational commitment among women.

Suggestions

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Implement adaptable work schedules and remote work options to support employees across all career stages.
- **Structured Mentorship Programs:** Establish formal mentorship and sponsorship initiatives to facilitate career development and progression.
- **Life-Stage-Specific Policies:** Design targeted HR interventions such as returnship programs, childcare support, and parental leave to address career-stage-specific needs.
- **Employee Feedback Mechanisms:** Conduct regular surveys and feedback sessions to assess the effectiveness of HR initiatives and tailor them accordingly.
- **Manager Training and Awareness:** Promote gender-sensitive leadership training to equip managers with the skills to support inclusive and equitable workplace practices.

Conclusion

The study concludes that life-stage-sensitive HR practices significantly improve retention, engagement, and career satisfaction among women employees in India. Flexible work arrangements and mentorship programs are key drivers of these outcomes. Organizations that adopt inclusive, adaptive HR strategies can better retain talent and build a more committed and sustainable workforce.

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