

INSTITUTIONAL SHIELDING OF WOMEN'S CAREER IN MANUFACTURING SECTORS: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

The manufacturing sector is a key contributor to economic growth, yet women's career advancement remains constrained by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. Institutional shielding comprises of legal provisions, organizational policies, and supportive workplace practices which is essential for ensuring women's safety, equality and professional development. The aim of the study is to examine how institutions identify barriers to women's careers in manufacturing sectors and the measures adopted to mitigate their impact. The purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies, such as anti-harassment mechanisms, maternity benefits, leadership support, and skill development initiatives, in fostering career progression. A significant gap exists between policy formulation and implementation, often limiting the intended outcomes and, at times, creating perceptions of "special treatment," thereby reinforcing subtle bias. The study concludes that institutional support must extend beyond formal protections, focusing on transforming organizational mindsets, strengthening accountability, and creating equitable pathways that enable sustainable career growth for women in the manufacturing sector.

Keywords: Institutional shielding, Women's career, Gender equality, Organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

Institutional shielding refers to formal and informal mechanism within organizations and policy frameworks that protect employees from structural, social and occupational risks. In the context of women employment, it includes gender sensitive policies, safety provisions, career support system and grievance redressal mechanisms. Effective institutional shielding ensures continuity, security and advancement in women's career. Manufacturing industries refers to a wide array of sectors that primarily focus on converting raw materials into finished products using various processes and machinery. These industries are essential for transforming basic inputs into more valuable outputs. They play a vital role in the economic structure of any nation by creating jobs, enhancing skills and generating income. Women's career reflects the progression of their professional lives, influenced by factors such as education, access to employment, organizational culture and societal norms. In male dominated industries, women frequently experience career interruption due to discrimination, restricted mobility and challenges in balancing work and personal responsibilities.

The manufacturing sector represents a significant pillar of economic growth and industrial development, yet women's participation and career advancement within this domain continue to face persistent challenges. Despite steady expansion and opening opportunities, women in manufacturing often encounter structural barriers that restrict their progress, including gender stereotyping, limited access to technical training, unsafe working conditions, pay disparities, and biased promotion systems (Zafarullah & Nawaz 2019; Gupta & Kiran 2023). These barriers contribute to the infamous "glass ceiling" phenomenon, where women's upward mobility within organizations is limited by invisible but pervasive obstacles (Berry A, Smith J 2022; McKinsey 2020). Institutional shielding, encompassing the legal, organizational, and cultural frameworks that support women's career development, plays a critical role in mitigating these barriers. Through comprehensive policies, safe work environments, skill-building programs, and leadership advancement opportunities, institutions can foster a more equitable and supportive workplace for women.

This study focuses on Karnataka's manufacturing sector, aiming to analyse how institutional mechanisms effectively shield women by addressing the multifaceted challenges they face. While many organizations introduce measures such as anti-harassment policies and maternity benefits, practical enforcement often reveals gaps that undermine their intended impact. Furthermore, some well-meaning protections may inadvertently reinforce

perceptions that women require “special treatment,” leading to subtle forms of bias and hindering true equality (Heilman 2012; Kabeer 2015). This research seeks to explore these complex dynamics and assess how institutional support can go beyond surface-level safeguards to transform organizational cultures, ensure accountability, and create sustainable career pathways for women. By enhancing women’s participation and retention, institutional shielding not only promotes gender equality but also contributes to greater productivity, innovation, and economic advancement within the manufacturing industry. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of robust institutional efforts to dismantle barriers and empower women’s careers in the evolving landscape of Karnataka’s manufacturing sector.

Review of Literature

Germain, Herzog & Hamilton (2012) The authors find that formal mentorship and gender-inclusive policies significantly improve women’s job satisfaction. They also suggested that manufacturing firms need structural reforms to support women’s career longevity.

Heilman (2012) examines how gender stereotypes create a lack of fit between women and male-dominated roles, resulting in biased evaluation and restrictions on career advancement despite equal performance. The study highlights that these barriers are sustained through subtle organizational practices and expectations rather than over discrimination.

Rahim Ajao, Akintunde Oluwafemi, Afolabi Abiodun, Okikiola I (2018). The study identifies gender stereotyping, biased promotion practices, limited access to mentorships and exclusion from informal networks as key organizational factors that restrict women’s progression into leadership roles.

Zafarullah & Nawaz (2019) examines the wage discrimination and lack of enforcement of labour law impede women’s advancement in manufacturing. Policy frameworks exist but are poorly implemented at the organizational level. The study points to the need for transparent pay systems and regular audits. It concludes that institutional accountability mechanisms are critical for equitable career growth.

Nair (2019); Sharma & Gupta (2021) highlights that despite increasing female enrolment in technical education, women in manufacturing remain concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid roles due to gender stereotyping, limited technical trainings and restricted mobility. Their studies also document a strong “glass ceiling” effect, where biased promotion practices, limited leadership opportunities and unequal access to skill-enhancing resources hinder women’s career advancement.

El Wali, Golroudbary & Kraslawski (2021) The study highlights that gender-specific health and safety training can reduce risk and improve confidence. It concludes that organizations must integrate safety with gender policy for long-term inclusion.

Scott & Davis-Sramek (2023) Gender norms limit women’s entry into male-dominated roles like heavy equipment handling. The authors examines that role modelling and targeted training reduce gendered barriers. They conclude that institutional interventions widen occupational mobility for women.

Goyal T.M, Fernandez C, Prakash S, & Ramesh A (2025) analysed the persistent gender gap in India’s formal manufacturing workforce, highlighting structural and institutional barriers such as limited gender-sensitive recruitment, promotion practices, and labour regulation. They argue that weak institutional frameworks fail to shield women from wage inequality and restricted career progression, reinforcing male dominance in manufacturing employment.

Irfan Ahmad, Sarfraz Ahmed & Dil Pazir (2025) They discussed that organizations with higher female representation achieves better productivity and efficiency outcomes. It emphasizes that institutional support mechanisms such as flexible working hours and gender-inclusive policies, directly influence women’s retention. The authors also highlight that societal norms outside the workplace can affect career continuity for women.

Research Methodology

The present study is a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach for data analysis. Secondary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using the survey method to obtain responses. The actual sample

size for the study is 50 respondents. Research design, aiming to identify and analyse the Institutional barriers that on affects women’s career in manufacturing sector.

Objectives of the study

1. To understand Institutional Shielding towards Women.
2. To identify key institutional barriers for women in Karnataka's manufacturing sector.
3. To examine legal, organizational and cultural support systems that boost women's safety, equality and career growth.

Scope of the Study

This research focuses on institutional shielding mechanisms for women's career advancement in Karnataka's manufacturing sector, examining barriers like the glass ceiling, policy implementation gaps, and support systems such as anti-harassment measures and skill development.

Statement of the Problem

This study is limited to the Institutional shielding for women manufacturing sector to examining barriers like the glass ceiling, policy implementation gaps and support systems such as anti-harassment measures and skill development.

Data Analysis and interpretation

The study is based on responses collected from 50 respondents who are working in various fields like IT, educational sector, marketing, HR, finance, manufacturing and also from students. The sampling techniques used were convenience sampling. Our respondents were chosen based on their accessibility, willingness to participate, and who are employed across various sectors.

Demographic Analysis

Table No 1.1		
Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage %
Male	25	50
Female	25	50
Total	50	100

Demographic Variable	Category	% of Respondents
Gender	-	Male-50
		Female-50
Age Group	15 to 25 - 30	60
	25 to 35 - 20	40
Occupation	Salaried- 21	42
	Students-20	40
	Others-9	18

The demographic analysis shows equal representation of male and female respondents. A majority of respondents (60%) belong to the 15-25 age group, indicating a younger sample. Occupationally, salaried employees from the largest group (42%), followed by students (40%), reflecting a balanced mix of working professionals and learners.

Infrastructure facilities and Safety Concerns at workplace

Agreement to statements

Statement 1: “Does women in manufacturing sector face gender stereotypes in daily work interactions?”

Table -1.2		
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	10
Agree	17	34
Neutral	22	44
Disagree	4	8
Strongly Disagree	2	4

The above table shows that perceptions regarding gender stereotypes in daily work interactions are mixed. While 44% of respondents remain neutral, a notable 44% agree or strongly agree that women face gender stereotypes. Only a small proportion disagree, indicating moderate awareness and acceptance of the issue in the manufacturing sector.

Statement 2: “Does the work environment is safe and supportive for women.”

Table -1. 3		
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	9	18
Agree	16	32
Neutral	18	36
Disagree	5	10
Strongly Disagree	2	4

The above table indicates that perceptions of workplace safety and support for women are generally positive. A combined 50% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the work environment is safe and supportive. However, a significant 36% remain neutral, suggesting mixed experiences or uncertainty. Only a small proportion(14%) disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, the findings reflect a favorable environment, though there is scope for further improvement to address neutral and negative perceptions.

Statement 3: “Does your organization has effective anti-harassment mechanisms?”

The table reflects respondents’ views on the effectiveness of anti-harassment mechanisms within the organization. A clear majority of respondents(66%) answered “Yes”, indicating that they believe the organization has effective anti-harassment measures in place. However, 18% responded “Maybe”, suggesting some uncertainty or lack of awareness regarding these mechanisms. Additionally, 16% responded “No”, highlighting concerns about effectiveness or implementation. Overall, the findings suggest a generally positive perception, but the presence of neutral and negative responses indicates a need for better communication, awareness and strengthening of anti-harassment policies within the organization.

Table -1. 4		
Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	33	66
No	8	16
Maybe	9	18

Statement 4: “To what extent are the anti-harassment mechanisms in your organization effective.”

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very effective	18	36
Effective	19	38
Neutral	10	20
Ineffective	3	6
Very Ineffective	0	0

The table presents respondents perceptions regarding the effectiveness of anti-harassment mechanisms in their organization. A majority of respondents view these mechanisms positively, with 38% rating them as effective and 36% as very effective, together accounting for 74%. About 20% of respondents remain neutral, indicating mixed experiences or limited awareness. Only 6% perceive the mechanisms as ineffective, while none consider them very ineffective. Overall, the findings suggest that anti-harassment mechanisms are largely effective, though continued efforts are needed to address neutral perceptions and further strengthen confidence among all employees.

Statement 5: “Does the maternity benefits provided are adequate and supportive?”

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	13	26
Agree	18	36
Neutral	14	28
Disagree	4	8
Strongly Disagree	1	2

The above table shows respondents opinions on the adequacy and supportiveness of maternity benefits. A majority of respondents (62%) either agree or strongly agree that maternity benefits provided are adequate and supportive, indicating overall satisfaction. About 28% of respondents remain neutral, suggesting mixed experiences or limited utilization of such benefits. Only a small proportion (10%) disagree or strongly disagree, reflecting minimal dissatisfaction.

Statement 6: “Does the workplace infrastructure (transport, sanitation, lighting, shifts) supports women's safety?”

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very Supportive	22	44
Supportive	14	28
Neutral	11	22
Unsupportive	3	6
Very Unsupportive	0	0

The above table reveals that a majority of respondents view workplace infrastructure as supportive of women’s safety with 72% expressing supportive or very supportive opinions, while only 6% perceive it as unsupportive, indicating generally positive perceptions.

Statement 7: “Does women's retention in your organization has improved due to supportive policies?”

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very High	5	10
High	9	18
Moderate	25	50
Low	6	12
None	5	10

The above table indicates that women’s retention has moderately improved due to supportive policies, with 50% respondents reporting moderate impact, while 28% perceive high or very high improvement and a smaller proportion reporting low or no impact.

Statement 8: “Does limited access to technical training acts a barrier to women's career growth?”

Table -1.9		
Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	4	8
Agree	18	36
Neutral	13	26
Disagree	8	16
Strongly Disagree	7	14

This table shows that a significant proportion of respondents agree that limited access to technical training acts as a barrier to women’s career growth, with 44% agreeing or strongly agreeing, while 30% remain neutral and a smaller section disagreeing.

Statement 9: Does pay inequality between men and women exists in the organisations?

Table -1.10		
Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very High	6	12
High	5	10
Moderate	20	40
Low	10	20
None	9	18

The table indicates that pay inequality between men and women is perceived at varying levels within the organization. A majority of respondents (40%) believe that pay inequality exists at a moderate level, suggesting it is a noticeable concern. About 22% perceive it as high or very high, reflecting significant concern among a section of respondents. Meanwhile, 38% feel that pay inequality is low or does not exist. Overall, the findings suggest that while extreme inequality is not widely reported, moderate pay disparity remains a prominent issue.

Statement 10: Do women face biased promotion practices?

Table – 1.11		
Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	5	10
Agree	16	32
Neutral	13	26
Disagree	13	26
Strongly Disagree	3	6

The above table indicates that a considerable proportion of respondents perceive biased promotion practices against women, with 42% agreeing or strongly agreeing, while 26% remain neutral and a smaller percentage disagree, reflecting mixed but notable concerns regarding fairness in promotions.

Statement 11: Overall, institutional shielding in your organization is effective in supporting women's careers

Table - 12		
Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Very effective	13	26
Effective	26	52
Neutral	11	22
Ineffective	0	0
Very Ineffective	0	0

The table indicates a largely positive perception of institutional support for women's careers. A majority of respondents (52%) rated the institutional shielding as effective, while an additional 26% considered it very effective, reflecting strong confidence in organizational support systems. About 22% of respondents expressed a neutral opinion, suggesting limited awareness or mixed experiences. Notably, no respondents rated the measures as ineffective or very ineffective, highlighting the overall effectiveness of institutional efforts in supporting women's career growth.

Findings

- The study reveals that majority felt the workplace is safe and supportive for women.
- Continued policy efforts are needed for equality and career growth.
- Infrastructure and maternity benefits supported safety and work-life balance.
- The anti-harassment measures and communication were generally effective.
- Some moderate concerns existed about gender stereotypes and pay inequality.

Recommendations:

- The organizations should aim at creating policies to eliminate inequality pay by reducing the gender stereotypes.
- Awareness programmes should be conducted in workplace on gender sensitisation and encourage them to inculcate the practice of gender equality.
- The organization should organize regular training programmes and promote gender sensitisation.
- Fair compensation policies should be followed by the organization.

Conclusion

- Despite overall positive perceptions, moderate issues related to gender stereotypes and pay inequality still persist in some organizations.
- The findings highlight the need for continuous policy strengthening, awareness initiatives, and inclusive practices to achieve complete gender equality in the workplace.
- Women's retention and career growth have shown improvement due to supportive policies, though further initiatives are required to enhance long-term impact.
- Regular training programs, transparent promotion practices, and fair compensation systems are essential to strengthen trust and promote gender equity in organizations.

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