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On-Ramps and Up-Ramps India

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KEY FINDINGS

India owes its surging economic growth of the past decade in no small part to a new generation of ambitious, educated women. However, all too often, women are pushed or pulled out of the workforce because of family pressures or unfriendly and biased work environments. Exploring and quantifying career interruptions on women's earnings, aspiration and ambition has been a central theme of our research over the last decade. In this study, we examine pressures women in India face and the ways in which female talent can be better leveraged in India's white-collar workforce. Our findings from this study reveal some surprising trends:

- In India, 36 percent of women off-ramp, roughly the same rate as women in the United States (31 percent) and Germany (35 percent). However, the average length of off-ramps in India (11 months) is much shorter than their counterparts in the United States (2.7 years) and Germany (1.9 years).
- Family-rooted pulls are huge forces behind this exodus: 75 percent of Indian women off-ramp for childcare (compared to 74 percent in the United States and 82 percent in Germany) and 80 percent for eldercare (compared to 30 percent in the United States and 18 percent in Germany).
- Unfriendly work environments also play a significant role: 72 percent of Indian women professionals leave because their careers are not satisfying or enjoyable; 66 percent leave because they feel their career progression is stalled.
- The good news: An overwhelming 91 percent of Indian women want to return to work, similar to the United States (89 percent) and significantly more than Germany (78 percent).
- Surprisingly, Indian women who off-ramp are able to rejoin the full-time, mainstream workforce in much higher proportions (58 percent) than in the United States (40 percent), or Germany (34 percent). They also face smaller salary penalties than their counterparts in the United States: 7 percent versus 16 percent.
- However, there's bad news for employers: 72 percent do not want to return to their former employer.
- Policies that support work-life balance would prevent Indian women professionals from leaving: reduced hours (62 percent), flex-time (59 percent) and telecommuting (55 percent).
- But flexible work arrangements can be a career killer: 54 percent of women fear that taking flex options will doom their promotional prospects. Sixty-two percent of women who took a scenic route, that is, who chose part-time or flexi-work, feel stalled, versus 48 percent of those who followed a conventional career path.
- Other factors that inhibit women from progressing in their careers: work/life imbalance; mobility and safety issues (54 percent feel unsafe during their daily commute); and stereotypes of success (73 percent of women at multinational companies and 55 percent at Indian companies say they need to compromise their authenticity to conform to their company's standards of executive presence).