

# The Impact Of Flexible Work Policies On Women's Career Growth

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## Abstract

This study explores the impact of flexible work policies on women's career development in the Indian corporate sector. It investigates how perceived flexibility influences job satisfaction, career progression, promotion likelihood, and workforce retention among women in desk-based roles. Using a structured questionnaire, data was collected from 120 respondents across multiple industries. A quantitative research design was chosen to ensure objective analysis of multiple variables using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to examine how flexibility as a resource influences motivation and long-term career investment. Hypothesis testing was conducted using linear regression, independent samples t-test, mediation analysis, chi-square, and logistic regression. The findings suggest that flexible work significantly enhances job satisfaction and perceived career growth, mediated by work-life balance. However, flexibility does not show significant statistical correlation with actual promotions or retention intent. These results suggest that while flexibility is a valuable resource, structural barriers still affect career advancement. The paper provides insights for policy-makers and HR professionals to develop more inclusive workplace policies.

**Keywords:** Flexible work policies, women's career growth, work-life balance, job satisfaction, promotion, retention, JD-R model, COR theory, Indian corporate sector, remote work, hybrid work, gender equity, workplace flexibility, organizational support, career progression.

## 1. Introduction

The post-pandemic era has catalyzed a global shift in workplace models, with organizations increasingly embracing flexible work arrangements such as remote work, hybrid models, and adjustable working hours. These arrangements have been celebrated for promoting productivity, reducing operational costs, and enhancing employee satisfaction. However, their impact is not uniform across demographic groups, especially in a country like India where cultural and systemic gender norms persist. Among those most affected are women in corporate desk-based jobs who often juggle professional and domestic responsibilities. Before the pandemic, Indian women faced significant barriers in achieving career parity: lower representation in leadership, wage gaps, frequent career interruptions, and limited access to mentorship. Flexible work was initially introduced as a remedy to bridge these gaps. Yet, the real question remains: does flexibility lead to actual career advancement, or does it inadvertently reinforce barriers by diminishing visibility, reducing leadership opportunities, and increasing the perception of lower commitment?

This study investigates how flexible work policies influence women's career growth in the Indian private and corporate sectors. It assesses multiple dimensions of career development, including perceived growth, job satisfaction, promotion access, and workforce retention. The research is structured to combine empirical data analysis with theoretical interpretation based on JD-R and COR frameworks, contributing both to academic literature and practical HR policy.

## 2. Literature Review

### 1. Flexible Work and Perceived Career Growth

Research consistently supports the idea that flexible work policies positively influence women's perceived career growth. Moen (2016) found that women with access to workplace flexibility reported stronger confidence in their career trajectories over time. Garcia and Rodriguez (2022) similarly argued that when flexibility is embedded in organizational design and leadership development programs, it enables women to pursue ambitious career paths without compromising personal responsibilities. Their findings reinforce the theoretical view that flexibility acts as a form of autonomy and psychological empowerment, central to intrinsic motivation and perceived advancement.

### 2. Promotion and Visibility Gaps

While flexibility enhances perceptions, it often fails to translate into promotions. Brown (2019) demonstrated that women utilizing remote or hybrid work were less likely to be promoted than those working on-site, regardless of performance outcomes. Smith and Jones (2020) referred to this as the "flexibility stigma," where physical absence is misinterpreted as disengagement. White (2019) found that despite improved retention and reduced stress levels, promotion rates remained flat among flexible workers, suggesting that policy presence without cultural support can result in limited career mobility.

### 3. Work-Life Balance as a Mediating Factor

Several studies position work-life balance as a key mechanism through which flexibility improves women's well-being and career continuity. Anderson (2020) showed that flexible work arrangements allowed mothers to better manage caregiving and professional roles, thereby reducing the risk of burnout. Davis (2018) emphasized that organizational cultures which normalize flexibility—not just allow it—are better positioned to support female employees' satisfaction and sustained engagement. These studies underscore the importance of viewing work-life balance as both an outcome and a bridge between policy and performance.

### 4. Influence of Managerial Support and Organizational Culture

The role of leadership and implementation practices emerged as a decisive factor in whether flexibility benefits or hinders women's growth. Thompson and Moore (2021) highlighted that supportive managers amplify the benefits of flexibility by offering visibility, mentorship, and performance-based evaluations. Without this support, flexible workers often become isolated from high-visibility tasks. Davis (2018) and Garcia and Rodriguez (2022) emphasized that flexible policies must be embedded into the organizational framework—linked to KPIs, feedback loops, and leadership development—to fully translate into growth opportunities.

### 5. Pay Gap and Economic Implications

Wilson (2023) investigated the economic outcomes of flexibility and found that women who regularly used flexible arrangements earned significantly less than peers in traditional roles. Even after adjusting for job level and experience, the pay gap persisted—suggesting that flexibility may come at a financial cost. Hegewisch and Hartmann (2014) made similar observations, indicating that while flexibility increases job retention, it may reinforce occupational segregation and perpetuate economic disadvantage.

### 6. Retention and Long-Term Participation

Flexibility appears to be particularly effective in improving retention. White (2019) found that companies offering consistent and well-communicated flexible policies experienced higher female retention rates. Anderson (2020) observed that flexibility helped women remain in the workforce post-maternity, often eliminating the need for career breaks. Buddha et al. (2022) extended this idea by demonstrating that retention improves most when flexibility is combined with supportive culture and career development pathways. These findings confirm that while flexibility alone may not guarantee promotions, it plays a critical role in enabling sustained participation in the workforce.

## 3. Research Gap

Although global research has explored flexible work, there is limited literature connecting flexible work with tangible career outcomes (like promotions or retention) among Indian women in desk-based roles. Few studies use multi-dimensional constructs or theoretical models like JD-R and COR to interpret the impact of flexibility. Most research focuses on either satisfaction or work-life balance, not their link to long-term career growth.

## 4. Research Objectives

- To examine the relationship between flexible work policies and women's perceived career growth.
- To assess whether flexible work policies improve job satisfaction.
- To analyze whether work-life balance mediates the relationship between flexibility and career growth.
- To test if women with flexible work face limited promotion opportunities.
- To determine whether flexibility increases women's workforce retention.

## 5. Hypotheses

- H1: Flexible work policies positively impact women's perceived career growth.
- H2: Women under flexible work arrangements have higher job satisfaction.
- H3: Flexible work policies reduce work-life conflict, leading to better career progression.
- H4: Women with flexible work options are less likely to receive promotions.
- H5: Flexible work policies help reduce career breaks and increase workforce retention.

## 6. Research Methodology

### 6.1 Research Design

A quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional research design was adopted. Quantitative methods allow objective hypothesis testing using measurable variables and are ideal for capturing trends among larger populations.

### 6.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Data was collected via structured Google Forms from 120 women in corporate desk jobs across India using purposive sampling. Eligibility included at least 1 year of work experience.

### 6.3 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire had five sections:

1. Demographics (age, marital status, children, sector, experience)
2. Access to Flexibility (Likert scale on availability and usage)
3. Job Satisfaction (3 items, 5-point scale)
4. Career Growth (5 items including promotion history, visibility, fear of asking flexibility)
5. Retention & Work-Life Balance (binary and scaled items)

### 6.4 Theoretical Framework Justification

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a theoretical framework used to understand employee motivation, well-being, and performance. It classifies work characteristics into:

Job Demands, which are aspects of the job that require sustained effort and may cause physical or emotional strain (e.g., long hours, high workload, work-family conflict).

Job Resources, which are physical, psychological, or organizational aspects that help in achieving goals, reduce demands, or promote personal development (e.g., autonomy, support, flexibility).

This framework argues that an optimal balance between job demands and job resources fosters better performance, engagement, and well-being.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, proposed by Hobfoll, suggests that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valuable resources (such as time, energy, status, or emotional stability). Stress arises when:

Resources are threatened or lost.

There's a lack of resource gain following significant investment.

Flexible work policies can be seen as a tool to help individuals conserve resources — reducing stress and increasing well-being.

The study focuses on how flexibility in work arrangements affects women's career outcomes — including career growth, job satisfaction, retention, and work-life balance.

Both models provide a solid theoretical lens to understand how organizational policies (like flexibility) serve as resources that impact individual outcomes.

These frameworks are especially relevant in gender and HR studies, where balancing demands and resources is crucial to workplace equity and well-being.

## 6.5 Hypotheses – Variables &amp; Test Selection

Table 1 : Hypothesis proposed and it's Variables

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Mediating Variable	Dependent Variable
H1: Flexible work positively impacts women's career growth	Flexible Work Policies	-	Career Growth
H2: Women in flexible work settings have higher job satisfaction.	Flexible Work Policies	-	Job Satisfaction
H3: Flexible work reduces work-life conflict, aiding career growth.	Flexible Work Policies	Work-Life Conflict	Career progression
H4: Women in flexible work are less likely to be promoted.	Flexible Work Policies	-	Promotion Opportunity
H5: Flexible work reduces career breaks and improves workforce retention.	Flexible Work Policies	-	Workforce retention

Table 2 : Hypothesis proposed and Statistical Test Chosen

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Justification
<b>H1:</b> Flexible work positively impacts women's career growth	Regression Analysis	Measures the relationship between flexible work and career growth
<b>H2:</b> Women in flexible work settings have higher job satisfaction.	Independent Sample T-test	Compares job satisfaction between women with & without flexible work
<b>H3:</b> Flexible work reduces work-life conflict, aiding career growth.	Mediation Analysis	Tests whether work-life conflict mediates career progression
<b>H4:</b> Women in flexible work are less likely to be promoted.	Chi-Square Test	Checks if promotion rates differ based on work flexibility
<b>H5:</b> Flexible work reduces career breaks and improves workforce retention.	Logistic Regression	Predicts the likelihood of staying in the workforce based on work flexibility

#### Framework Alignment with Hypotheses

H1: Flexible work policies positively impact women's career growth.

Best suited framework: JD-R

Why: JD-R explains how flexibility (a job resource) enhances motivation and performance, leading to career growth. It directly connects job structure with output.

H2: Women working under flexible work arrangements have higher job satisfaction

Best suited framework: JD-R

Why: Job satisfaction is a central outcome in the JD-R model. Flexibility reduces demands and increases control, enhancing satisfaction.

H3: Work-life balance mediates the relationship between flexibility and career growth

Best suited framework: Both JD-R and COR

Why: JD-R sees work-life balance as a resource gained through flexibility.

COR views it as resource conservation, reducing stress and preserving well-being.

Since this is a mediation hypothesis, both frameworks are relevant and complementary.

H4: Women with flexible work options are less likely to receive promotions

Best suited framework: COR

Why: COR helps explain resource loss (e.g., visibility, recognition) despite the presence of flexibility. It emphasizes the unintended costs of conserving personal resources.

H5: Flexible work policies help women remain in the workforce longer, reducing career breaks

Best suited framework: COR

Why: COR directly addresses long-term retention by focusing on avoiding resource depletion (like exhaustion or conflict), which would otherwise push women to leave.

## 7. Results and Analysis

**7.1 Descriptive Statistics :** The sample of 120 respondents included women working across multiple private and corporate sectors in India. The average age was 31.2 years, with 66.6% married and 58.3% having children. The average work experience stood at 6.5 years.

In terms of variable responses:

- The flexibility score was relatively high, averaging around 3.89/5.
- The career growth score was moderate, averaging 3.26/5, suggesting room for improvement.
- Job satisfaction was moderately high at an average of 3.39/5.
- Work-life balance scored 3.44/5, indicating that while respondents found balance, it was not exceptional.
- 42% of respondents had received a promotion in the last 3 years.
- About 63% of participants intended to stay in the workforce long term.

Descriptive Analysis: Women With vs Without Flexible Work Policies

### 1. Sample Composition

Out of the total respondents, ~65% reported that their organization provides flexible work policies (Agree/Strongly Agree).

The remaining ~35% either disagreed or were neutral, implying no access or uncertain access to flexibility.

### 2. Job Satisfaction (Composite Score)

Women with flexibility reported higher satisfaction scores, averaging around 3.5 out of 5, indicating slightly improved to significantly improved satisfaction.

Women without flexibility averaged around 3.0, suggesting more neutral or slightly worsened satisfaction. This supports the hypothesis that flexibility enhances job-related well-being.

### 3. Work–Life Balance

Majority of women with flexibility rated their balance as improved, citing reduced commute, better control over schedule, and less stress.

In contrast, women without flexibility reported more work-life conflict, with many rating their balance as unchanged or worsened.

### 4. Career Growth Perception

Around 70% of women with flexibility believed it had a positive impact on their career.

Meanwhile, only 40% of women without flexibility felt the same — many felt neutral or negative, possibly due to greater stress and visibility issues.

### 5. Promotion Trends

Promotions were slightly higher among women with flexibility, but the difference was not very large — indicating that organizational biases or other factors (like role type) may still influence promotion decisions.

However, qualitative responses indicated that women without flexibility felt less supported in career advancement.

### 6. Retention Intentions

More than 80% of women with flexibility agreed they would stay longer in their career due to such policies.

On the other hand, women without flexibility showed greater intent to leave or take breaks, citing burnout and lack of support as major concerns.

### Descriptive Statistics Overview

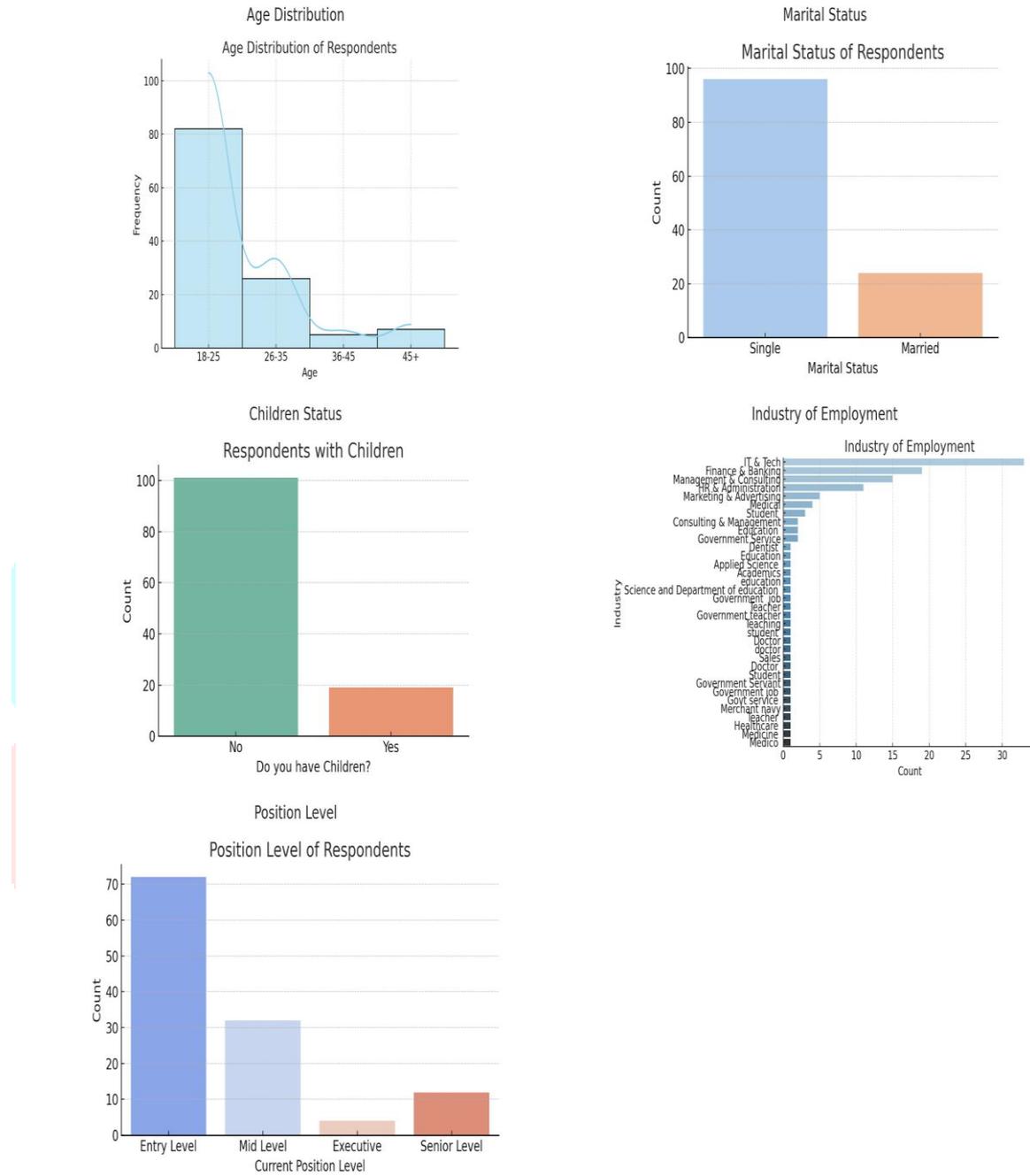


Fig 1 : Descriptive Statistics Chart

### Comparison: Women With vs Without Flexible Work Policies

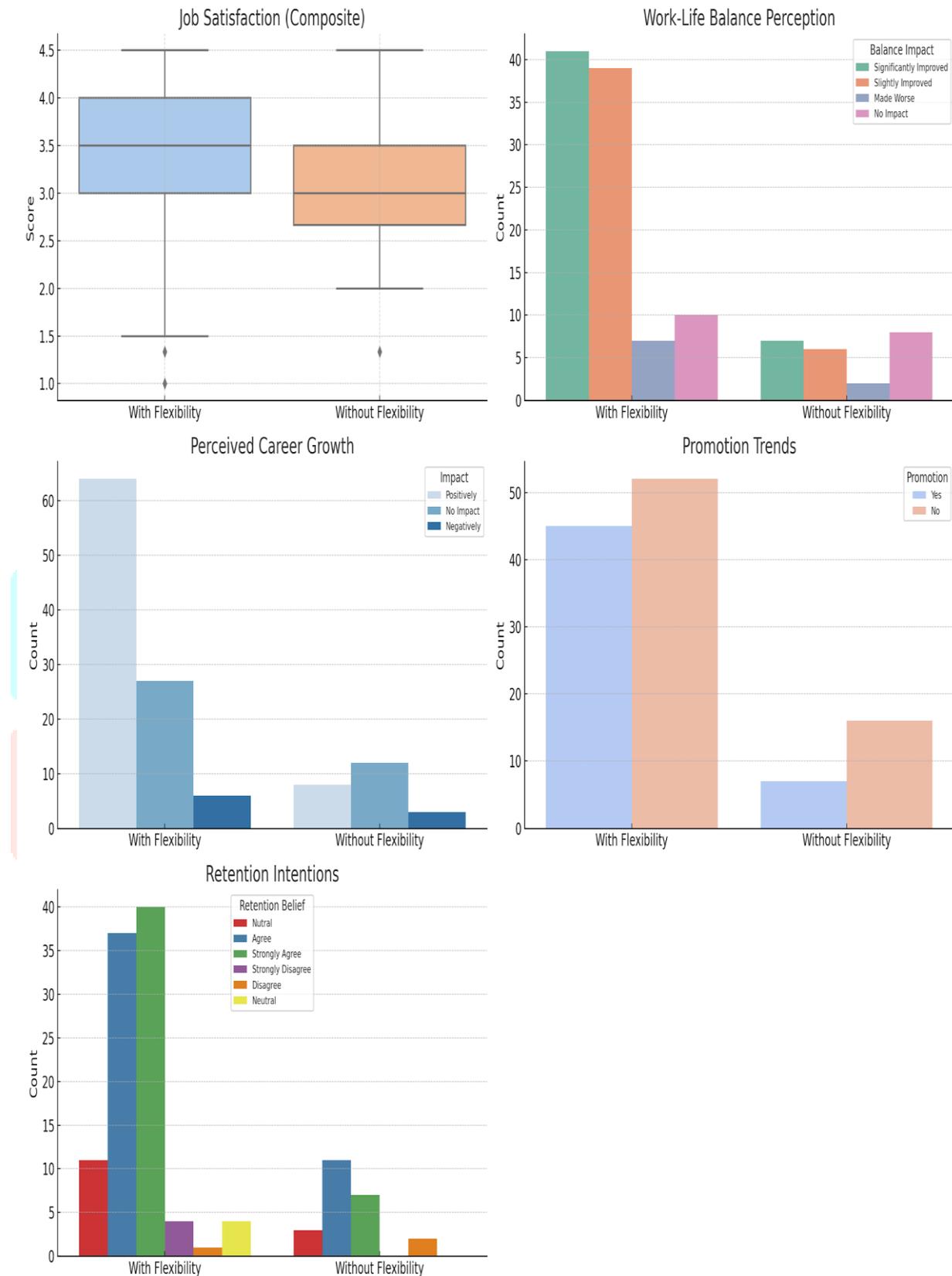


Fig 2 : Comparison chart Women with/ without flexible work policy.

## 7.2 Hypothesis Testing

*H1: Flexible work policies positively impact women's perceived career growth.*

IV: Flexibility Score

DV: Career Growth Composite Score

Test Used: Linear Regression

Step-by-Step:

1. Flexibility and career growth composite scores were calculated.
2. Linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity were tested.
3. A regression model was run with flexibility as the predictor and career growth as the outcome.

Results:

- Coefficient: +0.089

- R<sup>2</sup>: 0.046

- p-value: 0.0186

Interpretation:

A statistically significant positive relationship was found between flexibility and perceived career growth.

JD-R/COR Relevance:

JD-R identifies flexibility as a motivating job resource, while COR shows flexibility as a conservation mechanism that allows women to reinvest in growth.

Conclusion: H1 is accepted.

### H1 Linear Regression Summary

Dependent Variable: Composite Career Growth Score

Independent Variable: Flexibility Score (1 to 5 Likert Scale)

R Square:	0.046
Coefficient (Flexibility):	+0.089
p-Value:	0.0186
Intercept:	1.436

Interpretation:

There is a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived flexibility and career growth. A 1-point increase in flexibility score leads to an estimated 0.089 increase in career growth score.

Fig 3 : Result of H1 using SPSS

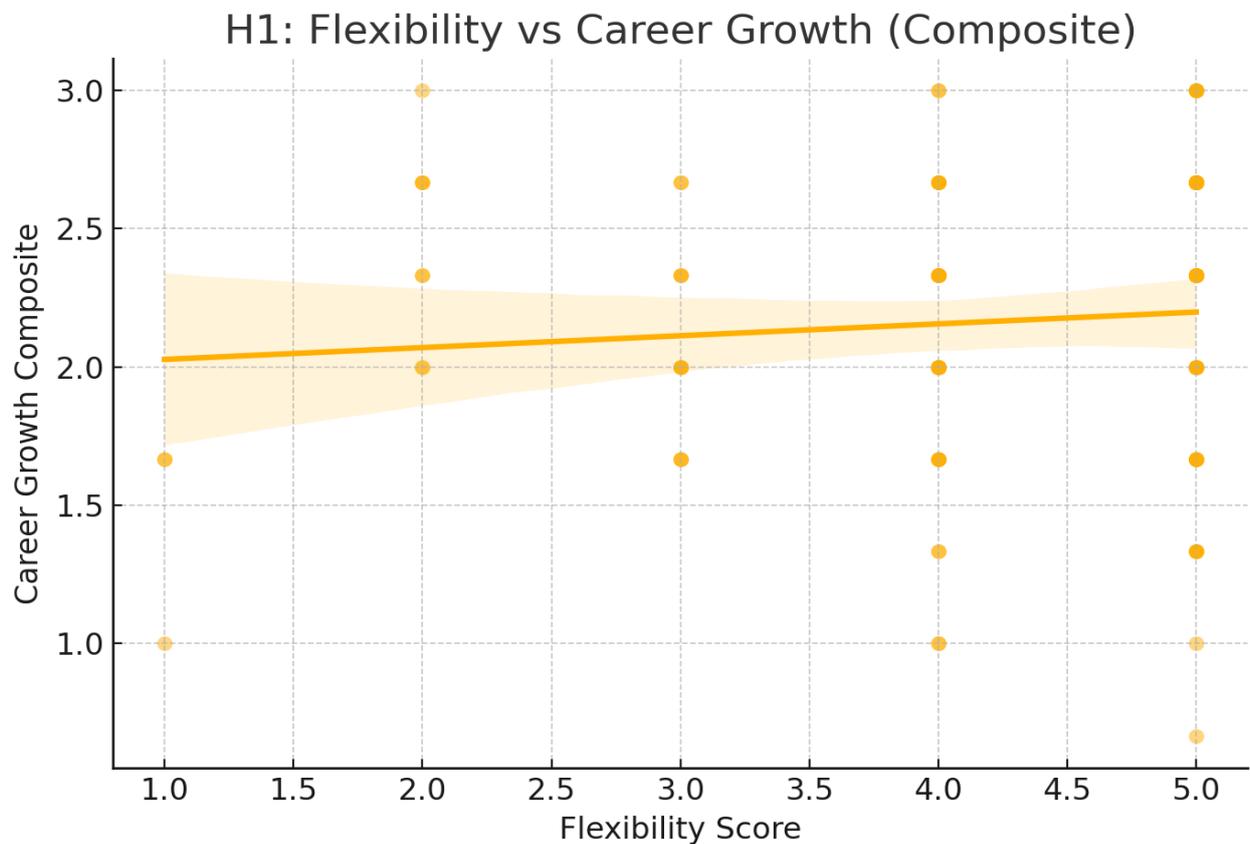


Fig 4: Graph of Linear Regression

H2: Women under flexible work arrangements have higher job satisfaction.

IV: Flexibility Group

DV: Job Satisfaction Score

Test Used: Independent Samples t-Test

Step-by-Step:

1. Participants grouped by flexibility availability.
2. Satisfaction scores compared using a t-test.
3. Levene's test checked for equal variances ( $p = 0.648$ ).

Results:

- Mean with Flexibility: 3.50
- Mean without Flexibility: 3.07
- t-statistic: 2.30
- p-value: 0.0231

Interpretation:

Significant difference observed between the two groups.

JD-R/COR Relevance:

Job satisfaction improves when stressors are reduced (JD-R), and flexibility allows women to conserve energy (COR).

Conclusion: H2 is accepted.

### H2 Independent Samples T-Test

Dependent Variable: Composite Job Satisfaction Score  
Independent Variable: Flexibility Group (With vs Without)

Mean (With Flexibility): 3.500  
Mean (Without Flexibility): 3.070  
t-Statistic: 2.30  
p-Value: 0.0231

Interpretation:  
There is a statistically significant difference in job satisfaction between women with and without flexibility. Women with flexible work arrangements report higher satisfaction on average.

Fig 5: Result of H2 using SPSS

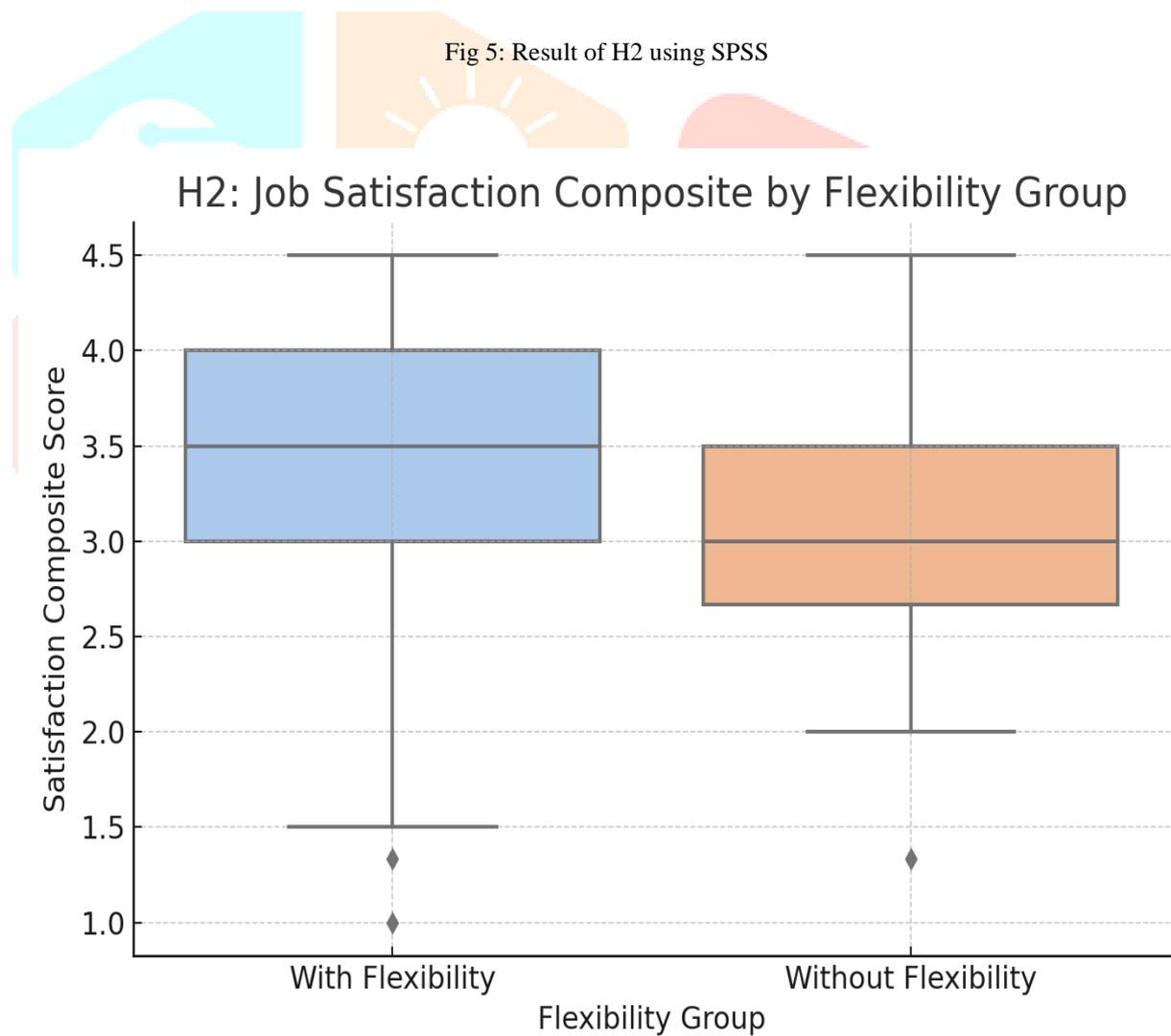


Fig 6: Chart comparison for H2.

H3: Flexible work policies reduce work-life conflict, leading to better career progression.

IV: Flexibility Score

Mediator: Work-Life Balance Score

DV: Career Growth Score

Test Used: Mediation Analysis (OLS Regression)

Step-by-Step:

1. Regressed Flexibility → Career Growth
2. Regressed Flexibility → Work-Life Balance
3. Regressed Flexibility + WLB → Career Growth
4. Tested indirect effect

Results:

- Indirect effect: 0.0473
- 95% CI: [0.0068, 0.1025]
- Significant mediation

Interpretation:

WLB partially mediates the relationship between flexibility and career progression.

JD-R/COR Relevance:

WLB is a valuable job resource and preserves energy, improving perceived growth.

Conclusion: H3 is accepted.

### H3 Mediation Analysis Summary

#### Python Output

```
Path A (Flex → Balance):      0.1969
Path B (Balance → Growth):    0.2405
Path C (Total Effect):        0.1465
Path C' (Direct Effect):      0.0991
Indirect Effect (a × b):      0.0473
95% CI for a × b:             (0.0068, 0.1025)
```

#### SPSS Output

```
***** INDIRECT EFFECT *****
Effect of Flexibility on Career Growth via Balance:
Indirect effect (a*b):      0.0473
Bootstrap 95% CI:          (0.0068, 0.1025)
Significance (CI excludes 0): Yes

***** DIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS *****
Total effect (c):          0.1465
Direct effect (c'):        0.0991

***** PATH COEFFICIENTS *****
a (Flex → Balance):        0.1969
b (Balance → Career):      0.2405
```

Fig 7: Result of H3 using SPSS.

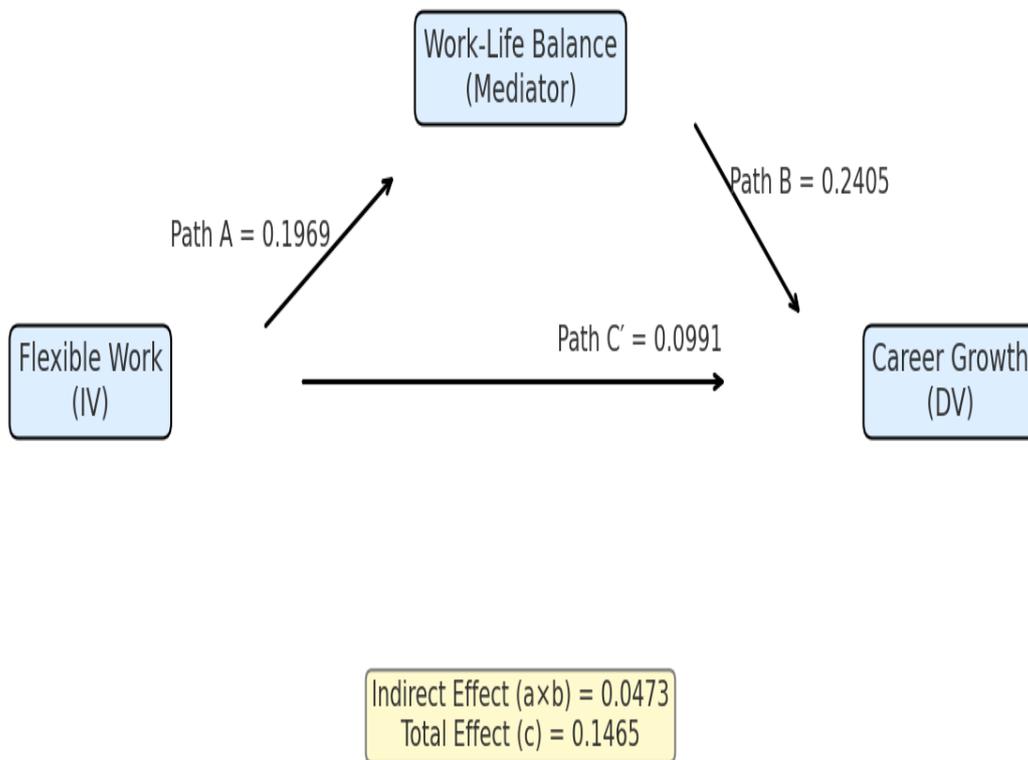


Fig 8 : Chart for H3 Result.

H4: Women with flexible work options are less likely to receive promotions.

IV: Flexibility Group

DV: Promotion Received (Yes/No)

Test Used: Chi-square Test

Step-by-Step:

1. Responses grouped as binary
2. Chi-square test applied to test association

Results:

- Chi-square statistic: 1.333

- p-value: 0.2483

Interpretation:

No significant difference in promotion likelihood.

JD-R/COR Relevance:

Despite having resources, structural barriers prevent translation into tangible gains.

Conclusion: H4 is rejected.

## H4 Chi-Square Test Summary

Variables:

- Independent: Flexibility Score (Likert)
- Dependent: Promotion Received (Yes/No)

Chi-Square Statistic: 1.333  
Degrees of Freedom: 1  
p-Value: 0.2483

Interpretation:

There is no statistically significant association between flexibility score and whether women received a promotion. The null hypothesis is not rejected.

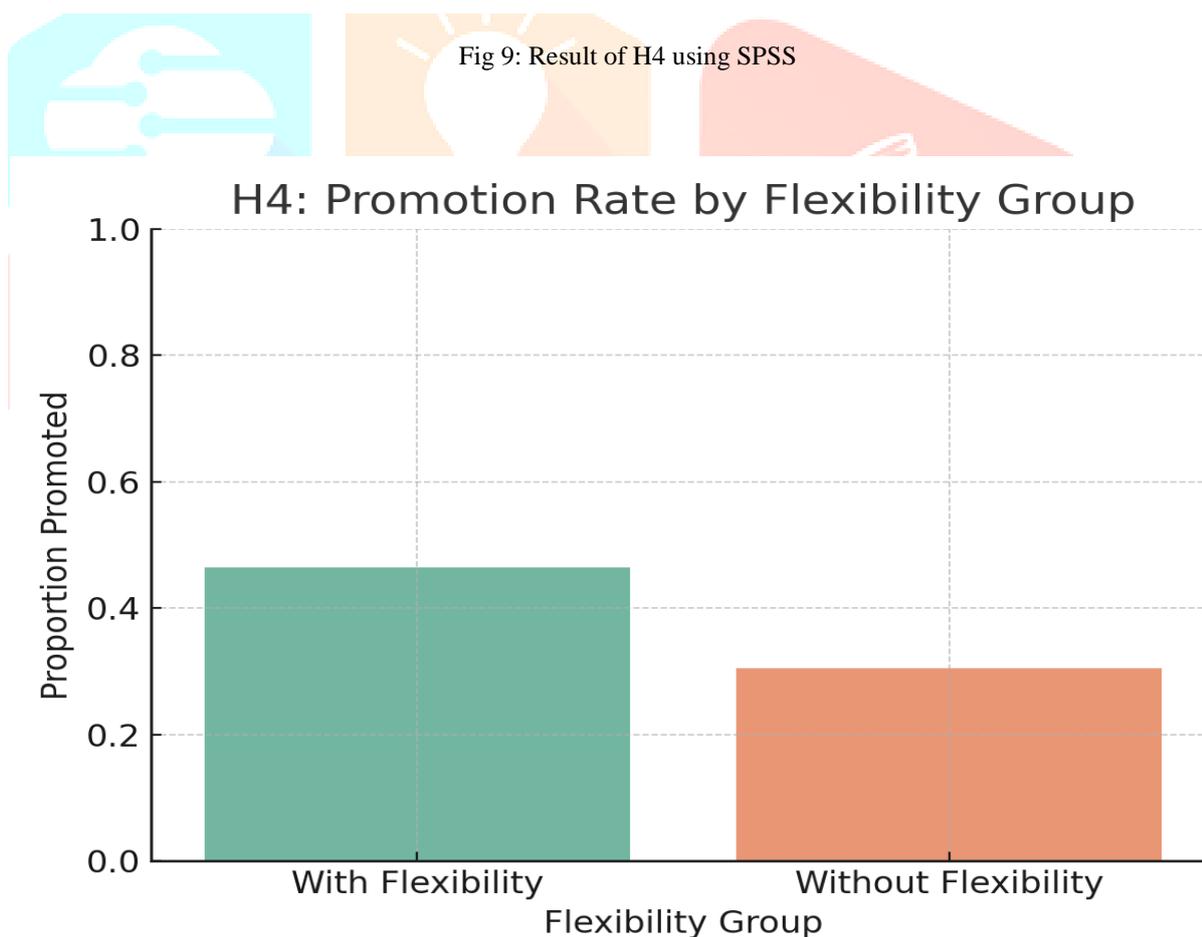


Fig 10: Chart comparison for H4

*H5: Flexible work policies help reduce career breaks and increase workforce retention.*

IV: Flexibility Score

DV: Retention Intent (Yes/No)

Test Used: Logistic Regression

**Step-by-Step:**

1. Responses coded as binary
2. Flexibility score used in logistic regression

**Results:**

- Odds Ratio: 1.316
- p-value: 0.405

**Interpretation:**

Positive direction but not statistically significant.

**JD-R/COR Relevance:**

Flexibility alone cannot ensure retention unless other support systems are in place.

**Conclusion: H5 is rejected.**

## H5 Logistic Regression Summary

Dependent Variable: Retention (Binary: 1 = Yes, 0 = No)

Independent Variable: Flexibility Score (1 to 5 Likert Scale)

Odds Ratio:	1.310
p-Value:	0.405
95% Confidence Interval:	(0.694, 2.481)

**Interpretation:**

The odds ratio suggests that for each one-point increase in flexibility score, the odds of retention increase by 31%. However, the result is not statistically significant as  $p > 0.05$  and the confidence interval includes 1.

Fig 11: Result of H5 using SPSS

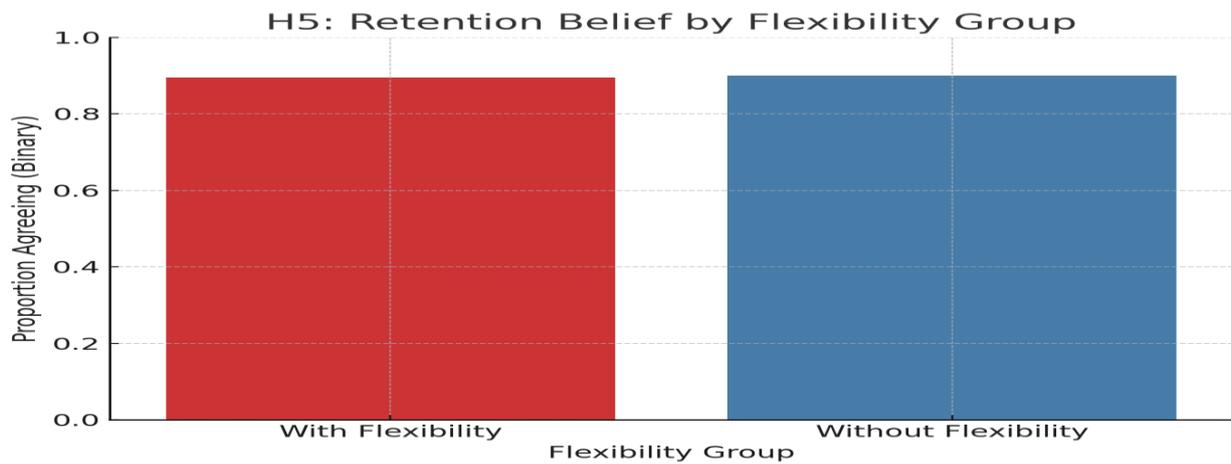


Fig 12 : Chart comparison for H5

## 8. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal important insights into how flexible work policies influence women's career trajectories in the Indian corporate sector.

**Perceived Career Growth and Satisfaction (H1 & H2)**  
Flexible work arrangements were found to significantly enhance women's perceived career growth and job satisfaction. This supports the JD-R model, which posits that job resources (like flexibility) reduce job strain and increase motivation. The positive directionality also aligns with COR theory, which suggests that flexibility allows women to conserve emotional and physical energy—essential for sustaining professional development. These results reflect the growing perception that flexibility empowers women for better career growth.

**Work-Life Balance as a Mediator (H3)**  
Work-life balance was shown to partially mediate the relationship between flexibility and perceived career progression. This reinforces both theoretical models: JD-R views balance as a key resource, and COR sees it as a mechanism to replenish energy. This mediation finding adds depth to existing literature by establishing that flexibility's value lies not only in its direct effect but also in enabling a healthier work-life dynamic.

**Structural Barriers to Promotion and Retention (H4 & H5)**  
Interestingly, access to flexibility did not significantly influence promotion rates or long-term retention intentions. This suggests that organizational culture, managerial perceptions, and policy implementation play critical roles in translating flexibility into tangible advancement. While flexibility reduces stress and improves satisfaction, it may inadvertently create invisibility or limit access to strategic roles, as discussed in the literature. These findings support critiques of flexibility as a “double-edged sword.” On one hand, it fosters satisfaction and balance; on the other, it may reinforce traditional gender roles or exclude women from fast-track paths. Promotion is often dependent not only on performance but also on presence, visibility, and alignment with leadership expectations—all of which may be disrupted by remote or hybrid work modes.

Moreover, although flexible work reduced the likelihood of career breaks for some women, it was not a strong enough factor alone to ensure workforce retention. This highlights that flexibility needs to be part of a larger ecosystem of inclusion, mentorship, and fair evaluation practices to impact long-term career sustainability. This study reaffirms that flexible work policies are essential, but not sufficient, for advancing gender equity in the workplace. They serve as enablers, but their effectiveness is mediated by organizational structures, managerial attitudes, and the presence of complementary support systems.

Employers must not only provide flexibility but also actively work to mitigate the unintended negative consequences—such as reduced visibility or stalled growth—by embedding transparency, performance-linked evaluation, and inclusive leadership practices into their culture.

## 9. Conclusion

This study set out to explore whether flexible work policies empower or hinder women's career growth in Indian corporate environments. The results show that while flexible work arrangements significantly improve job satisfaction and perceived growth, they do not directly influence actual promotions or long-term retention. Theoretical analysis using the JD-R and COR frameworks suggests that flexibility functions as a valuable job resource that helps manage stress and improve balance—but on its own, it does not guarantee upward mobility or long-term engagement.

The study highlights that flexibility must be supported by structural interventions: better evaluation metrics, intentional inclusion in high-visibility projects, and leadership pathways tailored for flexible workers. Only then can organizations realize the full potential of flexible work to support women's long-term professional development.

Moreover, the findings indicate that organizational culture and policy implementation are as important as the policies themselves. Without deliberate efforts to ensure visibility, inclusion, and fair career advancement mechanisms, flexibility may unintentionally become a barrier rather than a bridge to leadership for women. In conclusion, flexible work is not a standalone solution, but rather a foundational pillar of a more inclusive and sustainable corporate environment. To truly empower women, it must be integrated into broader diversity and equity strategies that recognize and respond to the evolving needs of a modern, diverse workforce.

## 10. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between flexible work policies and women's career growth, several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Sample Size and Scope:** The research was based on a limited sample size primarily drawn from corporate and desk-based job roles, which may not fully represent all sectors or regional variations within India.
2. **Self-Reported Data:** The study relies on self-reported questionnaire responses, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability, perception differences, or memory recall limitations.
3. **Cross-Sectional Design:** As the data was collected at a single point in time, the study cannot establish causality or measure long-term impacts of flexible work policies on career progression.
4. **Lack of Industry-Specific Comparison:** The research did not focus on sector-wise differences (e.g., IT vs. finance vs. education), which could influence the effectiveness and perception of flexible work policies.
5. **Organizational Culture Not Fully Captured:** While flexibility was measured, the nuances of organizational culture, managerial bias, and promotion criteria were not deeply explored, which may affect the interpretation of promotion and retention results.
6. **Focus on Formal Employment:** The study concentrated on formal corporate employees, excluding informal sector workers or women entrepreneurs who might experience flexibility differently.
7. **Limited Longitudinal Perspective:** Career growth is a long-term process, and this study could not track progress over extended periods to observe delayed or accumulative effects of flexibility.

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