



## Impediments to Women Accountants' Career Progression in Malaysia

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### Abstract

The apparent conflict between family life and an accounting career appears to be negatively impacting the retention of women in public accounting (Stockard, 1990). Typically, accounting entails long hours, travel, and a stressful business environment. For many women, these negative factors are intensified by family obligations and the pressures of striving for acceptance in a traditionally male-dominated profession. This investigation set out to directly survey women in the accounting profession regarding their perceptions of their own career barriers in their organizations. In addition, the study was intended to identify possible reasons for women accountants to leave their organizations and ways to retain them. The study was intended to develop a survey questionnaire that would quantify and measure perceptions of the glass ceiling. Following the review of a wide body of literature about "glass ceiling" this study established a conceptual model which related the impediments to career progression. This conceptual model leads to the formulation of an empirical schema and the generation of testable hypotheses. The following measurable constructs or variables were established: (1) exclusionary environment; (2) family responsibility; (3) workplace benefit; (4) job flexibility; (5) corporate policies; (6) job stress; and (7) job demand. This study has practical implications for employers in considering the needs and problems of women accountants in the work force. Alleviating key problems should help employers acquire and retain women accountants for a longer time, thereby maximizing their hiring and training investment. More importantly, dealing with these issues would help intelligent and capable women to continue a career as a professional accountant.

**Keywords:** "Glass-ceiling" phenomena, Career progression, Women accountant, Malaysia

### 1. Introduction

Despite the dramatic increase in the number of female accounting graduates during the current decade, the number of women accountants continues to be very small and static. The number of women accountants entering the labour market

and the number of them holding top position is not reflective. Referring to a survey done by The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) 1991 as reported by Collins (1993), 59 percent of new graduates hired in 1990 by public accounting firms are female. Surprisingly, women have not been very successful in advancing in public accounting firms and few have made it to the partnership level. The Karpin Report 1995 found in Labourne (1996), has supported this where the number of women in management continues to grow, but the number of women in executive management position has not risen commensurably. Thus, there is a need to study this issue so as to find out the reasons that impede the female accountants' in Malaysia from holding top executive post. Furthermore, the findings will indicate whether the Malaysian female accountants' shared the same opinion with the reasons that hindered career progression with their counterpart from other countries. Besides, the findings will generalize the issue and bring forward for further global discussion. Extensive literature on impediments to career progression with evidence from USA and Europe, indicates that women face obstacles which are not faced by their male counterparts (Merrell and James, 2001; Scheuermann et al., 1998; Linehan and Scullion, 2001). The available literature on the accountancy profession shows that this is not exception to the pattern reported in the general literature.

The AICPA Special Commission on the Upward Mobility of Women Special Committee (1989) found several issues that impede the promotion and retention of women in public accounting. The reasons are childcare and family responsibilities, awareness of success criteria, the perception problem, cultural and attitudes toward women, stress, dating and marriage, and involvement in professional associations. Stockard (1990) stated that the conflict of family life and an accounting career appears to be negatively impacting the retention of women in public accounting. She mentioned the key problems retaining women in the employment were overtime, job stress, flextime opportunities, being more understanding when employees request time to handle family-related problems. On top of that Coughlan (2002), identified four other reasons that lead the female accountants to leave their profession. These are lack of flexibility, glass ceiling, not happy with working environment and feeling unchallenged in their jobs.

Although women entered the paid labour force in growing numbers over the last 25 years (Koshal et al., 1998), and now constitute 49 percent of the Malaysian workforce, their progression to the ranks of senior management seems to be blocked by invisible, rarely penetrable barriers – the “glass ceiling”.

Since its genesis in the 1970s, the term “glass ceiling” has come to symbolize the invisible barriers blocking women from rising to the top of the corporate pile. Whether at work or in politics, this artificial barrier – an obstacle fashioned from attitudinal and organizational prejudices – remains in effect despite decades of social development and attempts at advancement in gender equity. The literature on the glass ceiling suggests that beliefs and attitudes held by organizational members as well as contextual aspects of the organization contribute to the barriers that impede women's career advancement. Ragins et al (1998) cite corporate culture as the primary barrier to women's advancement into upper management. The women they surveyed described inhospitable and exclusionary environments as barriers to their advancement and can influence their supervisors' evaluations of their performance and potential. Davidson and Cooper (1992) discussed role stress as a factor with the multiple role demands inherent in running a career, a home and a family.

While the metaphor of the “glass ceiling” helps to explain why women have poor representation in the power, leadership and decision-making arenas, it does not explain why a ‘glass ceiling’ actually exists. According to Still (1994), cultural factors have emerged as the significant impediment to women's progress through the ‘glass ceiling’. She believed that a cultural dilemma arises whenever either a male or female enters a non-traditional area and it needs a very concerted effort to overcome the prejudices, stereotypes, traditions and accepted practices if more than just a token number of women are to be given their chance in senior management. In 1993, a longitudinal study of four Johnson & Johnson (J&J) companies by Families and Work Institute, New York found evidence of positive links between family-responsive programmes and a range of desired outcomes. The J&J study found indications that the company's policies contribute to the retention of those who use them, decrease negative spillover to family and personal life, and enhance loyalty and job satisfaction. The study acknowledge that the impact of family-supportive policies is mediated by aspects of the work environment. In the same year, Catalyst also conducted a longitudinal study of employees in 70 companies offering flexible work arrangements. The study sought to examine the impact of flexible work arrangements on career goals, paths, and advancement by interviewing 45 women who used flexible work arrangements. Catalyst concluded that although flexible work arrangements result in “slowing down” of careers, they enhance the retention of employees and allow women to maintain a career identity, professional skills, and career momentum. However, according to Schwartz (1996), while definitive answers about the career impact of using family-friendly policies remain elusive, strong evidence exists that these policies do not operate in a vacuum. Researchers and individuals working to implement family-friendly policies emphasizes that supervisor attitudes and company culture affect both whether policies are used and the repercussions that result for those who do use them. She affirmed that a consensus has emerged that, despite the support they offer, family-friendly policies will not assist in dismantling the glass ceiling until attitudes of the supervisors and co-workers, as well as corporate cultures and traditional career practices begin to change.

In Malaysia, Koshal et al (1998) did a study on how men and women at different ranks feel about women's advancement in the organization, the differences in the leadership styles of men and women managers and their effectiveness in achieving organizational goals. They found that women do not perceive equal opportunities for career advancement. Women perceived that they are under-represented at all management levels, that equity in compensation is still an issue, and they need to work harder than men for recognition and rewards. In India, Nath (2000), interviewed 20 women executives to examine the impact of social, organizational and personal biases on the progression of professional women. She found that women managers were successful because of the interplay of organizational and familial support, coupled with the individual drive for success. Wood and Lindorff (2001) tests the prediction that there will be sex differences in how middle managers perceive promotion requirements. Results from 351 male and 156 female managers indicated that sex does not strongly influence the belief that every manager receives the same opportunities for advancement. On the same note, Jackson (2001) explores how women in middle management perceive their career advancement opportunities and what they consider their organizations to be doing to support their advancement. Overall, results suggest that the glass ceiling is still an issue for women within organizations. In Omar and Davidson (2001)'s comparative cross-cultural overview of women in management, they emphasized that empirical evidence derived from the numerous studies on women managers (see Cleveland et. al. 2000; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Davidson, 1997; Donnell and Hall, 1980; Morrison et. al. 1992; Parker and Fagenson, 1994; White et. al. 1992) have however shown that while each of these perspectives have contributed towards understanding the barrier women face in management, each on its own cannot satisfactorily explain the pervasiveness of the glass ceiling.

A survey by The Upward Mobility of Women Special Committee in 1988 identified seven obstacles confronting female accountants. First is the cultural attitude towards women where outdated and negative ideas about women still exist in the workplace. Second is the perception problem where employers deny that obstacles exist. Third is the awareness of success criteria where not all women are able to identify the subtle criteria necessary for advancement to top level positions. Some corporations have instituted programs to help women become aware of criteria necessary for a success. For example meeting regularly with the president and CEO to discuss salaries, job advancement, sexual harassment, work-family conflicts and other matters if concern. Fourth is the child care and family responsibility. These responsibilities can create problem if women are interested in having a career. However, some employers have established on-site or off-site child care centers, part-time schedules, extended leaves of absence, flextime schedules, vacation and sick leave policies to accommodate working parents. Fifth is the stress. Women accountants is in greater stress than men accountants because of the family and management pressures, cultural prejudice, and the perception that to succeed a women's performance must exceed that of her male colleagues. Sixth is the dating and marriage. As more women enter the accounting profession, the possibility of emotional involvement among co-workers increases that may cause friction in an organization. Lastly, is the lack of women involvement in professional associations.

Supplementing the above findings, Wellington. found in Stern (1998), reported that the percentage of talented women who make it to the top will be smaller because they are the victims of myths and stereotypes, like the idea that once they have a child they will not be as committed to their jobs. Similar studies conducted by Child (1992), reported some of the complaints made on female accountants, among others as being too emotional; after the birth of a child they have less interest in their career; travel and overtime are problems as soon as a female accountant has a child; women quit their jobs when their husband relocate, and women do not work well with other women. However, D'Angelo (1994) declared that childbirth does not reduce the commitment of the women. This has been supported by the survey conducted by AWSCPA/ASWA (American Society of Women Accountants) where 61 percent respondents stated that having a child does not interrupt their career. In 1994 D'Angelo interviewed female and male CPAs and found that most of the women agree there is a difference in the way female and male CPAs communicate and this impacts the way each gender interacts with clients and colleagues. Women accountant was cited to address problem with more creativity, more communicative, the communication style open opportunities in the profession, and have the personality needed to serve the public.

With the efforts taken to retain the skill and expertise of female employee, many leave the profession after several years. Again, this leads to the anxiety to further examine the issue. According to Labourne (1996), a survey found that 63 percent of the former women accounting members had left after five years or less. This phenomena need to be studied so as to find out whether the Malaysian female accountants leave the profession due to demanding career (Hooks and Cheramy 1994, and Kinard et al. 1998) or other more relevant issues. This finding is important as it can assist the policy makers in the implementation of future action to be taken with regards to the best interest of the female accountants.

This study will assist in providing possible answers to the following research questions:

- i) Do women accountants perceive that there are organizational barriers that impede their career advancement in their companies?
- ii) Do women accountants perceive that their organization have undertaken initiatives to remove career-impeding barriers that impede their success?

iii) How do women accountants perceive their chances for success in career advancement in their organizations?

The research objectives of this study are to model, define, measure and validate a set of constructs that are relevant to career progression as manifest from the attitude and behaviour of women accountants and to empirically test for their relationships. Specific objectives then, are as follows:

To examine factors affecting career progression among women accountants in Malaysia

To identify possible reasons perceived by women accountants for leaving the job

To identify possible ways perceived by women accountant which will make them stay in an organization

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Scope of study

The scope of this study has been delimited in terms of the selection of sample. The sample is limited to female chartered accountants who are registered with The Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA). The study focused on female accounting professionals who have been working for more than five years either in the public and commercial sectors and having its place of work located in Klang Valley. The reasons for confining the units of analysis to these subjects are due to the concentration of companies having its place of business in the Klang Valley and that career progression in any profession is usually expected after five years in employment.

### 2.2 Reasons for leaving and ways to retain women accountant

Women make up more than half of those employed as accountants and auditors in the United States today. At least 50 percent of those women have children. Many are leaving the accounting profession when their employers have not been able to offer creative solutions that help the working parent to strike a balance between personal and professional lives. According to the Educational Foundation for Women in Accounting Report found in Epstein (www.careerbank), 23 percent of all women CPAs leave profession for more than six months because of their family responsibilities. This is supported by Karpin Report 1995 (Labourne, 1996), a survey found that 63 percent of the women in the accounting profession left after five years or less. A recent American study reported by Coughlan, (2002), identified four major reasons for leaving that was cited by the women. These are lack of flexibility, glass ceiling, unhappiness with work environment and feeling unchallenged in their jobs.

Hayes and Hollman, (1996), suggested the ways that an accounting firm can remove obstacles to advancement and accommodate the unique needs of its mature and committed female employees. There are innovative schedules, low-cost day care, mentor programs, career enhancing opportunities, and diversified training. Doucet and Hooks (1999), stated that family-friendly policies, flexible work arrangements and the use of technology have helped reduce the turnover rate among women. On top of that, they also added that women must also be proactive to retain their careers by acting like an executive from day one, find a mentor, communicate their needs, do not be defeatist, and be prepared to negotiate. In the year 2000, Epstein the CEO of Deloitte & Touche, make some recommendation on how companies can retain valuable assets of working mother. These are reduced hours/workload, flextime, childcare at work facilities, telecommuting, and initiatives. He commented that flexible work arrangement sharpens their competitive edge and it is one of the ways to keep talented people in the firm.

According to Stockard (1990), the conflict of family life and an accounting career appears to be negatively impacting the retention of women in public accounting. She identified the key problems in retaining women in employment are overtime, job stress, flexi time opportunities, and being more understanding when employees request time to handle family-related problems. She also suggested that, by alleviating the key problems should help employers acquire and retain women employees for a longer time, thereby maximizing their hiring and training investment. D'Angelo (1994) reported that most women who succeed at the balancing act stress the importance of a supportive family environment. D'Angelo (1994), reported that 'flex-time' or 'alternative work arrangement' have emerged as a suggestion to retain women CPAs because firm have begun to realize that the cost of training new employees is far more expensive than adjusting a current employee's hours. Coughlan, (2002) also suggested that firm should promote mentoring programme to retain the women accountant from leaving

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

Based on the extensive literature on impediments to women's career progression, the career barriers can be explained from the internal and external perspectives. The various factors contained in the conceptual model in Figure 2.1 will need to be operationalised for the purpose of developing and empirically testing hypotheses. An empirical schema can be presented as an extension of the conceptual model (Figure 2.2). It depicts the relationships between independent and dependent variables to be used in this study. There are seven independent variables and they are hypothesized as having direct effects on the dependent variables.

Insert Figure 2.1 here

Insert Figure 2.2 here

## 2.4 Hypotheses Development

Lack of appreciation from superiors and management support, poor communication among colleagues, job specification not clear, and performance evaluation not transparent and too rigid are items of relevance to the label “exclusionary environment”. Frequency of traveling outstation, lack of support from spouse and family and possibility of relocation to another city involve balancing family commitment with job demands are relevant to the factor which is labeled family responsibility. Employment benefits covering such facilities as medical, retirement and pension, sick leave and short term disability insurance are items of relevance to the label of ‘workplace benefits’.

The respondents perceived the importance of policies that recognize and accommodate the balance between work and family responsibilities. Such practices include flexible hours, child care and job sharing. Women with major child rearing find it difficult to engage in after-hour activities, therefore missing out on the opportunity to interact with decision makers. Ability to work from home, housing assistance and on-site day care centre relate to the respondents’ needs for job flexibility and these three items are categorized likewise. The respondents’ quest for a fair annual performance appraisal and performance bonus policy together with salary adjustment tied to performance evaluation reflects the undue elements of corporate practices.

Job stress is identified as a factor with multiple role demands inherent in running a career, home and a family (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). Five sources of stress faced by women accountants identified by a team of researchers are: job discrimination, cross-gender relations, career paths, time pressures and home versus work. Overtime payment and policies for continual progression to partnership were identified as elements of job stress. Too heavy workload and too often new tasks being assigned are relevant to the factor labeled “job demand”.

Hypotheses depicting the relationships between the independent and dependent variables were hypothesized as follows:

- H<sub>1</sub> Components of exclusionary environment as perceived by women accountants are significantly related to career progression
- H<sub>2</sub> The family commitment components as perceived by women accountants are significantly related to career progression
- H<sub>3</sub> Elements of workplace benefits as perceived by women accountants are significantly related to career progression
- H<sub>4</sub> The extent of job flexibility as perceived by women accountants is significantly related to career progression
- H<sub>5</sub> The extent of corporate practices and policies as perceived by women accountants is significantly related to career progression
- H<sub>6</sub> The extent of job stress as perceived by women accountants is significantly related to career progression
- H<sub>7</sub> The extent of job demand as perceived by women accountants is significantly related to career progression

## 2.5 Sampling and variables measurement

### 2.5.1 Selection of subjects for the sample

This study is designed to collect quantitative data through a survey from the women accountants working in companies located in Klang Valley. Questionnaires were sent to 3,000 female chartered accountants who are registered member of The Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA). The survey was mailed with a covering letter explaining the aim of the study and assuring respondents of the confidentiality of their responses. To return the completed questionnaires, a self-addressed stamped envelope is attached to each questionnaire.

### 2.5.2 Questionnaire

Studies focusing on women accountant as the unit of analysis frequently use questionnaires to obtain data for dependent and independent variables that would otherwise be publicly unavailable. Examples include studies on perceptions of issues related to women employed in public accounting (Trapp et. al., 1989); a factor-analytic approach profiling job selection differences of male and female accountants (Ahmadi et. al., 1995); employment gaps, work satisfaction and career advancement among women chartered accountants (Burke and McKeen, 1995); recruitment, examination performance and career progress of women chartered accountants (Gammie and Gammie, 1995); and career and family (Stockard, 1990). In designing the questionnaire, preliminary discussions were held with several women accountants for the purpose of gaining insights into prevailing circumstances relating to obstacles in preventing them to move up the ladder at the same pace as their male counterpart. Some useful inputs were collected from these discussions with female chartered accountants and used in the adoption of some questions in the instrument.

### 2.5.3 Variables measurement

In developing the independent variables, suitable instruments tested in selected prior studies were sought. Those drawn upon were as follows: Burke and McKeen (1995) for use of employment gaps, work satisfaction and career

advancement; Wood and Lindorff (2001) for gender differences on career progress; Nath (2000) for the impact of social, organizational and personal biases on career progression; and Bond (1987) for indicators of “accommodating workplace”.

Table 1 list down four components of impediments and the items underlying each independent variables which are believed to have some influences on the dependent variables. Dependent variables are devised from two measures which are self-reported facts about number of years in current position and number of years working. Articles from McDermott (1998); Collins (1993); and Scheuermann et. al. (1998) lend support to the identification of measures of the dependent variable, career progression. The variable measurement for each of the independent and dependent variables are assessed on a 5-point “low/very high” scale of level of importance and level of effect on job performance.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Response from respondents

A total of 396 usable responses were received, giving a response rate of 13.3%. Fifty percent of the respondents were in the top management positions namely, as Finance Directors, Chief Financial Controller, Chief Financial Officer, Accountants and Auditors. Twenty percent of the respondents hold managerial posts such as Account Manager, Audit Manager and Finance Manager and 119 respondents (30%) are at junior level such as Assistant Manager and Account Officer. Fifty percent of the respondents worked in trading and/or servicing companies, 65 (16%) of the respondents worked with companies manufacturing industrial products, and 58 (15%) were attached with finance companies. Out of 396 respondents, 349 (88%) of them have served their current employers for less than 5 years, a total of 50 (12%) of them have been in their current position between 5 to 10 years and about only 5 of them (1%) have been serving their current employer for more than 10 years.

Sixty four (16%) of the respondents indicated that they have been working for 5 years and below, 188 (48%) respondents have been working between 6 to 10 years and about 144 (36%) have spent more than 10 years of their life earning a living. 354 (88%) of the respondents have changed jobs throughout their career and 42 (11%) of the respondents admitted that they have yet moved to another organization. Out of 396 female accounting graduates who are registered as members of MIA, 311 (78%) are married and 87 (22%) of them are single.

Table 2 also gives the results of Cronbach alpha reliability tests. It shows that Factor 6 and Factor 7 have poor internal reliabilities with alpha equals to .4087 and .5728 respectively. Despite these poor results, the 2-item measure of job stress and job demand are retained respectively in this study. Their poor reliabilities are to be noted as limitations and any interpretations of their relationships with other variables are to be treated with caution. The other four constructs are found to be reliable with Cronbach alpha ranging from .6914 to .8024.

#### 3.2 Tests for Confounding Effects of Demographics

Preliminary analysis is also undertaken to determine whether any demographic factors associated with the respondents or their companies have a confounding effect on the dependent variables and, therefore need to be controlled for in the testing of the hypotheses by regression analysis. The existence of significant relationships between the demographic variables and the dependent variables can be gauged from Pearson’s correlation coefficients. Correlation coefficients give an indication of both the strength and the direction of the relationship between the variables. Demographic attributes of present designation, number of years in current position, total number of years working and marital status are included as dependent variables in the empirical schema and therefore, its effects on the independent variables will be made explicit in the regression analysis in latter sections of this chapter.

Table 3 presents the bi-variate correlations the demographic variables (numbers 1 to 3) and the dependent variables (numbers 4 to 6). These relationships are highlighted inside the box in **Table 3**. The results indicate that there are no significant correlations between industry currently attached and any of the dependent variables. Therefore, this demographic variable is unlikely to have a confounding effect. However, marital status of the respondents is significantly positively correlated with each of the dependent variables of number of years in current position, total number of years working and the number of times changing jobs. Therefore, marital status will need to be included in the subsequent regression analysis. Further, significant correlations between the demographic variable of present designation and dependent variable of total number of years working, suggest that subsequent comparative analysis between top, middle and junior level of management should yield some significant differences.

#### 3.3 Hypotheses testing for effects on career progression using regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis is used in explaining the effects of women accountant’s perception of impediments on career progression. It was in  $H_1$  that hypothesized the exclusionary environment arising from lack of appreciation from superiors, lack of management support, work specifications not clear, poor communication among colleagues, performance evaluation too rigid and not transparent, would have an impact on career progression. It was hypothesized in  $H_2$  that the women accountants’ perception towards family responsibility *vis a vis* the need to travel

outstation frequently, lack of support from spouse and family, the need to balance family commitment with job demands and the possibility of being relocated to another city, would have an influence on their career progression.  $H_3$  predicts that the workplace benefits such as medical benefit, retirement benefit, sick leave and short term disability insurance, is significantly related to career progression. In  $H_4$  it was hypothesized that job flexibility in terms of ability to work from home, housing assistance and on-site day care centre, would have an influence on women accountants' perception on the existence of "glass ceiling". Corporate practices on annual performance appraisal, salary adjustment tied to performance evaluation and performance bonus policy are hypothesized in  $H_5$  to have an influence on career progression. In  $H_6$  it was hypothesized that issues such as disparity in payment of overtime rate and policies relating to continual progression to partnership caused job stress and would influence the women accountants' perception on their upward mobility in the organization. Finally, in  $H_7$  job demand arising from workload too heavy and new tasks being assigned too often would have an influence on women accountants' perception on career progression.

Table 4 presents the result of the regression analysis to explain or predict the relationship among the independent variables and the dependent variable (total number of years working and number of years in current position). The regression model has produced a fairly strong model fit with adjusted  $R^2$  of .061. As can be seen in Table 4 the results of the regression analysis give non-significant between the six independent variables against dependent variable of career progression. The significant effect on career progression exist in terms of job stress which is significantly negatively related to career progression. Therefore,  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_5$ ,  $H_6$  and  $H_7$  are rejected.

The potentially confounding demographic variable of marital status and the number of times changing jobs are also included in the regression model. Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis between marital status and number of times changing jobs as independent variables and career progression, as dependent variable. An examination of the results reveals that there is a significant model fit, with reasonable levels of adjusted  $R^2$  of .132. The regression coefficient in Table 5 reveals significant positive relationship between marital status and career progression. They reinforce findings about the relationship between marital status and its effect on women's career advancement as found in the literature on "glass ceiling", an invisible barrier that keeps women from rising above a certain level in corporations.

### *3.4 Reasons for leaving and ways to retain women accountant*

Open-ended questions were used to solicit the recipients' reasons for leaving the organization. Respondents were given two open-ended questions where they were asked to indicate three possible reasons why women in the accounting profession in their organization left their job and what are the measures which organization needs to consider in order to retain them. The answers were then categorized as shown in Table 6. The female respondents indicated reasons why they left their firms. The categories included unsuccessful transfers, management turnover within the firm, better offers, discontent with compensation and personal reasons. Respondents believed they were less accepted by partners than were their male counterparts and nearly half reported having fewer advancement opportunities. In addition, they indicated that the reason they left their employer was stress, better opportunity and no chance for advancement. Personal conflicts fell into the categories of perceived discrimination and cross-gender relations. Comments indicated problems working with other staff members, delays in promotions of female employees by particular members of management, and too little or unequal pay. It appears that many of these problems are gender specific and are the cause of these women's stress. Many of the women commented that they were discriminated against or made to feel uncomfortable in their roles.

Women cited inflexibility in working hours and lack of access to child care. Many women accountants remain frustrated by what they see as patronizing and excluding behaviour by some of their male counterparts. They felt that the job is too demanding causing them to suffer from stress. They claimed that they were given no proper job specification which makes them less motivated. Travel and relocation are also often common elements of managerial jobs. Respondents perceived that refusing to travel or to work evenings or weekends is detrimental to their career (Swiss and Walker, 1993). Work-family policies such as child care and flexi-time are the most consistent benefits quoted by the respondents that will enhance retention of employees. These views were supported by various studies which cited positive impact of work-family initiatives on recruitment, productivity and employees attitudes. Greater time flexibility is the family-friendly policy most desired by women employees. The provision of extended leaves, part-time work, flexibility and family supports (parental leave for men, flexible benefits, support during relocation, and child care) would enable companies to retain talented women who- without such mechanisms for achieving the balance they desire – might otherwise leave (Schwartz, 1989). Corporate work-family initiatives designed to acknowledge and support those juggling the multiple demands of work and family life, should be particularly beneficial to women's career progression (Schwartz, 1996). Systematic change must be undertaken, if employers efforts to address work-family issues are to be effective in supporting both career development and family life for women.

The attitudes of supervisors and colleagues are seen by women accountants as disturbing factors in their career. Having a supportive supervisor and a workplace that accommodates personal and family needs is associated with taking

more initiative on the job. Impact of family-friendly policies and programmes is influenced both by supervisor support and company culture. Corporate culture – the norms and values that are communicated through supervisors' attitudes, career paths, and organizational practices for assessing and developing the potential of employees – has been shown to exert a strong influence on the use of leaves and flexible working arrangements.

One reason frequently given for the high turnover rate among women accountants is that women leave the workforce earlier than men because they lack the necessary job commitment. Many of the women consciously choose not to strive for the top as their priorities lie outside the workplace. This is supported by Mohammad Ahmadi et al (1995) and Gammie and Gammie (1995), in their studies which showed that generally, family characteristics and job circumstances have a larger direct impact on job commitment in women. Women who worked for the most accommodating companies were more satisfied with their job, were sick less often, took fewer sick days, worked more on their own time, worked later into their pregnancies, and were more likely to return to work than women in less accommodating workplaces. According to Piotrkoski et al (1993) "accommodating workplace" include sick leave, disability leave, parental leave, job protection, health insurance coverage during leave, a supportive superior, flexible scheduling and child-care assistance. Lack of training for women hinder them to effectively manage their careers and contribute with confidence and initiative to the profession, their employers and the business community.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study are fairly consistent suggesting the importance of family related issues to women in accounting. Some suggestions were made to include offering flexible time, reducing travel time and providing more child care benefits to the women in the accounting profession. Factors identified influencing turnover in this study were job satisfaction, dissatisfaction with the firm direction, overtime demands, quality, diversity and length of job assignments, lack of opportunity for independent thought and action, lack of guidance and lack of maternity/paternity leave policy.

The current study examined attitudes toward the job, motivational factors, perceived discrimination and intention to turnover of women in the accounting profession. The survey confirmed a finding in previous surveys that travel is not generally perceived as a problem. Travel was not a significant factor, but job stress, overtime and the existence of a two-career household were seen as affecting either the marriage or marital status. The study revealed that some respondents perceived that having children had a negative effect on their employment opportunities. They were convinced that children impaired job flexibility and possibilities for promotion.

It is apparent that there has been some progress regarding barriers related to glass ceiling. It appears that the women in this study do perceived several barriers to career advancement in their organizations.

The findings and conclusions from this study should be read with the following limitations in mind:

- (a) limitations embodied in selected sample;
- (b) limitations embodied in the design and administration of the survey;
- (c) limitations of the data analysis; and
- (d) limitations of scope in interpreting the results.

The limitations on sample size which confined to registered MIA members ignored those women accountants who are not registered with MIA, whose characteristics might be significantly different. The inclusion of non-members should help in triangulating the findings in this study. The study did not gather information from employing organizations, which could shed light on the policies and practices they use in their approach to the women career and whether these have changed over time and in which directions.

Second, limitations are embodied in the design and administration of the survey used in this study. The trustworthiness of data collected from field surveys depend on how carefully the questionnaire is designed and administered. Not all variable measures in the questionnaire have been based on replications of previously developed and tested instruments. However, the items developed for all measures in the questionnaire have been drawn from various literature sources, and the questionnaire was piloted to check that all items were comprehensible to respondents. As detailed in Chapter Four, factor analysis was applied to the set of items to verify that the variables adopted in this study were measured in a uni-dimensional way.

Third limitation are in the data analysis used in this study. Multiple regression equations used in this study contain up to seven independent variables. This large number of variables in the empirical model presents the prospect of multicollinearity. Multicollinearity prevents the independent variables from exhibiting a substantially unique contribution to the explanation or prediction of the dependent variable, and also causes the regression coefficients to be highly unstable. In this study, the regression equations all satisfied variable inflation factor (VIF) tests for the level of multicollinearity.

Fourth limitation is that data has been analysed in this study, and conclusions have been drawn, on the basis of a single research method, that is, a field study. This raises the issue of “common method variance” (Podsakoff, 1986). Spector et al (1997) have argued that the most effective way to overcome common method variance, other than methodological weaknesses is to test ideas with different methods. For example, an experimental verification could be provided of the relationships found in a survey method. This study, however, has not taken a multiple method approach. In defence of a single survey method, evidence indicates that people often accurately perceived their social environment (Balzer and Sulsky, 1992) and that common method variance may not be a much of an artifact as previously assumed (Bass and Avilio, 1990). Although questionnaire surveys serve to highlight statistical average relationships between formally measured variables, they do not reveal the informal arrangements that exist, or how these may affect behaviours in organisations.

The results in this study must be interpreted within the confines of the hypotheses that have been generated. Possibilities exist for alternative specifications of hypotheses and regression equations. Finally, as with any empirical studies, the results can be generalized only to the population from which the sample was drawn.

This study has practical implications for employers in considering the needs and problems of women accountants in the work force. Alleviating key problems should help employers acquire and retain women accountants for a longer time, thereby maximizing their hiring and training investment. More importantly, dealing with these issues would help intelligent and capable women to continue a career as a professional accountant. Excessive overtime hours required during peak periods can be reduced by recruiting additional part-time or full-time staff. Techniques in reducing job stress include providing job stress awareness seminars, seminars on minimizing the effects of stress, and on-site exercise/ relaxation classes during the workday. Stress from a two-career household can be reduced by employers offering more flexi-time opportunities. A feeling of discrimination against women with children can only lead to employee dissatisfaction and discontent. Employers should give assurance that discrimination does not exist and remove the perception among female employees that children may be used as a criterion in considering promotions.

Questions such as the following could be examined:

Is training provided for employees to explain relationship between work-family policies and upward mobility

Do policy guidelines for leaves and flexible work arrangements address career-impact issues and the concerns held by both employees and managers?

Implications for future research can include:

- a) a focus on organizational governance and its policies and practices in the career development domain, especially where these affect women accountants;
- b) a multi-level approach which could provide a wider range of data relevant to a fuller assessment of the career path followed by female accounting graduates; and
- c) the inclusion of spouses or partners of these women should provide rich data pertaining to career influences outside the direct job role and organizational context.

This research represents the first stage of a larger project, a major survey of 3000 members, aimed at exploring gender-based difference in career goals, and structural barriers to female professional and career progression. Information will be gathered about the careers and aspirations of both female and male accountants. It is a landmark study, the findings of which will be of great importance to MIA and the profession at large. The suggested research represent activities that should be pursued concurrently and have the potential to inform and enrich one another. Additionally, these activities offer opportunities for co-operation and collaboration among employers, researchers and policymakers. A partnership approach to achieving a fuller understanding of the issues presented in this study, and to effect change, represents the best method for making strides to dismantle the glass ceiling. For the long-run success of women accountant and the profession, employers must give further consideration to “women issues” in order to retain these valuable and productive employees.

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Table 1. Independent variables measurement

Independent variable	Items	Method of calculation
<b>Workplace benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical benefit</li> <li>• Retirement benefits – pension</li> <li>• Sick leave</li> <li>• Short term disability insurance</li> <li>• Ability to work from home</li> <li>• Housing assistance</li> <li>• On-site day care centre</li> </ul>	Seven items, 5-point “low/very high” scale of level of importance
<b>Performance evaluation and remuneration package</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overtime pay</li> <li>• Policies for continual progression to partnership</li> <li>• Annual performance appraisal</li> <li>• Salary adjustment tied to performance evaluation</li> <li>• Performance bonus policy</li> </ul>	Five items, 5-point “low/very high” scale of level of importance
<b>Job demand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workload too heavy</li> <li>• Lack of appreciation from superiors</li> <li>• Work specification not clear</li> <li>• Lack of management support</li> <li>• Poor communication among colleagues</li> <li>• New tasks assigned often</li> <li>• Performance not transparent</li> <li>• Performance evaluation too rigid</li> </ul>	Eight items, 5-point “low/very high” scale of level of effect on job performance
<b>Family commitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of travelling outstation</li> <li>• Lack of support from spouse and family</li> <li>• Balancing family commitment with job demands</li> <li>• Possibility of relocation to another city</li> </ul>	Four items, 5-point “low/very high” scale of level of effect on job performance

Table 2. Reliability Test using Cronbach Alpha

Item	Description of items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
		<b>Exclusionary environment</b>	<b>Family commitment</b>	<b>Workplace benefits</b>	<b>Job flexibility</b>	<b>Corporate policies</b>	<b>Job stress</b>	<b>Job demand</b>
<i>Eigenvalue</i>		3.655	2.482	2.525	2.490	1.938	1.257	1.402
<i>Percentage of variance explained</i>		28.0	10.2	7.2	6.8	5.8	5.2	4.6
<i>Cumulative percentage</i>		28.0	38.2	45.4	52.2	58.0	63.2	67.8
<i>Cronbach alpha</i>		.8712	.7929	.8024	.7951	.6914	.4087	.5728

Table 3. Correlations Analysis between demographic variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Present designation	1.000					
2 Industry currently attached	-.060	1.000				
3 Marital status	-.087	.056	1.000			
4 No. of years in current position	<b>.093</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.239**</b>	1.000		
5 No. of years working	<b>-.146**</b>	<b>.075</b>	<b>.306**</b>	.182**	1.000	
6 No. of times you changed jobs	<b>-.012</b>	<b>-.065</b>	<b>.216**</b>	-.123*	.138**	1.000

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Table 4. Regression results for independent variable against dependent variables

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Std Beta	T-Score	Sig T	VIF
Career progression	Exclusionary environment	.034	.396	.692	1.553
	Family commitment	.060	.732	.465	1.444
	Workplace benefits	.097	1.140	.256	1.527
	Job flexibility	.074	.936	.351	1.337
	Corporate policies	-.095	-1.286	.200	1.164
	Job stress	-.294	-3.951	<b>.000**</b>	1.171
	Job demand	.044	.574	.567	1.236

**Model Fit Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .061 ; F value = 2.853; Sig F = .007**

\* Significant at .05 level; \*\* significant at .01 level

Table 5. Regression results for independent variable against dependent variables

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Std Beta	T-Score	Sig T
Career Progression	Marital status	.377	7.856	<b>.000**</b>
	Number of times changing jobs	-.060	-1.259	.209

**Model Fit Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .132 ; F value = 30.958; Sig F = .000**

\* Significant at .05 level; \*\* significant at .01 level

Table 6. Reasons for leaving and ways to retain women accountant

	<b>Reasons for leaving</b>	<b>Ways to retain women accountant</b>
<b>1. Job Demand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• too demanding; too heavy; work pressure</li> <li>• long, inflexible working hours</li> <li>• transfer; relocation; extensive traveling</li> <li>• no job specifications; no job satisfaction; not motivated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• workload not too heavy</li> <li>• flexible, shorter working hours; part time job</li> <li>• transfer; relocation; outstation; traveling</li> <li>• clear job specification; job satisfaction; job security; less stressful</li> <li>• clear line of communication</li> </ul>
<b>2. Work-Family Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family commitment; lack of quality time spent with family; married</li> <li>• no personal life</li> <li>• policies on leave; benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work from home</li> <li>• child care centre</li> <li>• work-family balance policy; family benefits</li> </ul>
<b>3. Gender Discrimination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unfair treatment</li> <li>• performance evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• equal treatment</li> <li>• fair performance evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>4. Role of Supervisors/ Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not happy with management, superiors, corporate politics; lack of management support; no appreciation from management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognition, appreciation, understanding by superiors</li> <li>• management support</li> </ul>
<b>5. Career Prospects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better job prospect; higher salary elsewhere; poor salary</li> <li>• no promotion; no career progression</li> <li>• no training provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• salary increment; bonus; attractive remuneration package</li> <li>• career prospect; opportunities for career advancement; partnership</li> <li>• promotion; empowerment</li> <li>• motivational factors; incentives; partnership</li> <li>• training and development programme</li> </ul>
<b>6. Accommodating Workplace/ Work Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• location of workplace and home</li> <li>• facilities not conducive</li> <li>• problem with subordinate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conducive; workplace near to home; friendly staff;</li> <li>• good corporate governance;</li> <li>• professional management supporting colleagues</li> </ul>
<b>7. Women Commitment</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote social interaction</li> <li>• give them respect</li> <li>• health reasons</li> <li>• positive thinking; aggressive; committed; accept changes, challenges; show interest</li> <li>• support from spouse and family</li> </ul>

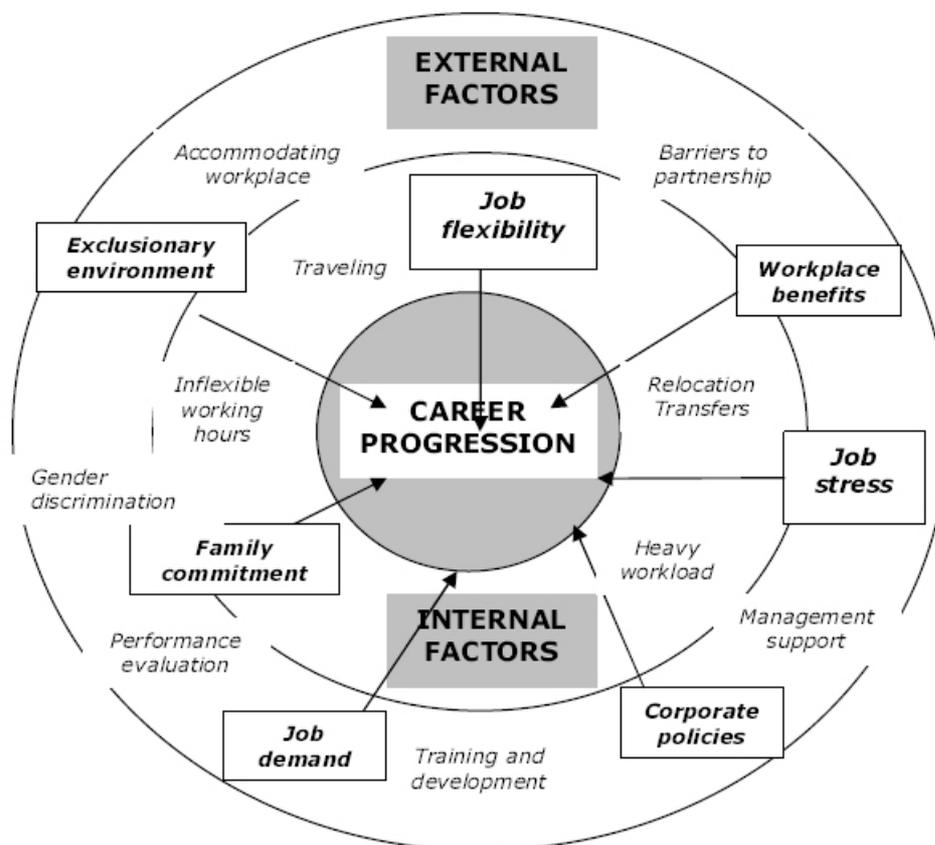


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Model for Impediments to Career Progression

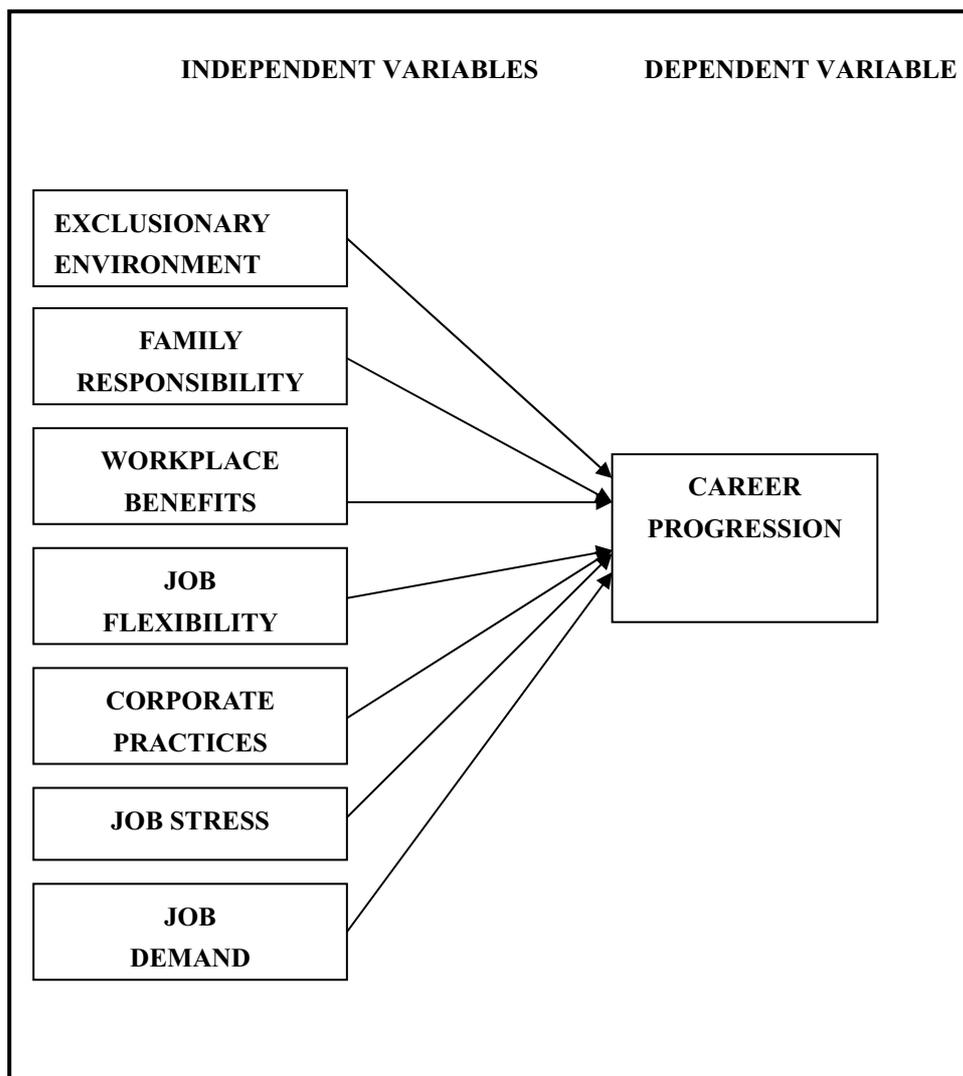


Figure 2.2 Proposed Empirical Schema of Impediments to Career Progression