

Women Over 40 in the Workforce: Social Barriers, Adjustments, and Support Systems for Career Launch and Re-Entry - A Global Perspective

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Abstract: *Women who launch or enter a career after the age of 40 face unique challenges of cultural, economic and social structures. While global labour markets rapidly emphasize inclusion, midlife remains structural and altitudinal obstacles for women's workforce participation. The letter examines social determinants affecting the re-entry of career among more than 40 women, analyses obstacles such as gender stereotypes, age -old, and careful roles, and examine adjustment and strategies employed by women. It also highlights the role of institutional and social support systems, including policies, training programs and organizational initiatives. A comparative global perspective underlines the difference between developed and developing economies in enabling women's regeneration. Addressing these obstacles is not only a gender equity issue, but also a matter of social justice and economic stability.*

Keywords: Women over 40, Workforce re-entry, Social barriers, Gender equity, Career transitions

1. Introduction

Women's workforce participation has long been affected by social expectations, family responsibilities and systemic inequalities. For more than 40 women, these dynamics are more complex than age-related discrimination, chronic skill perceptions and structural obstacles (Moen & Sweet, 2004). Career re-entry after a break, be it both individual and institutional challenges, need to navigate both individual and institutional challenges. Globally, midlife women represent a low talent pool, with a possible contribution to innovation, leadership and economic development (ILO, 2020). Nevertheless, their inclusion is constantly obstructed by stereotypes and insufficient support systems.

This paper frames the re-entry of women over 40 into the workforce as a social issue, highlighting that exclusion from meaningful employment impacts not only individual livelihoods but also broader social equity and economic development

Barriers to Workforce Re-Entry for Women Over 40

- a) **Gender Stereotypes and Ageism-** Obstacles for more than 40 women to enter the workforce re-enter Gender conservatism and age one of the most prominent obstacles is the intersection of gender bias and age discrimination is shown in Figure 1. Employers often see more than 40 women as less adaptable for new technologies or less ambitious than young workers (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). In patriarchal societies, cultural criteria strengthen the belief that older women should prefer domestic roles on career aspirations.
- b) **Skill disrespect-** Rapid technological changes in the digital age create skills intervals for women returning after long career breakdown. Research suggests that re-entry's often face doubts about their ability to keep pace with workplace demands (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). In stem regions, this difference is particularly acute, limiting the ability of women to re-enter high-paying areas.

- c) **Care responsibilities-** Women care roles for women, children, elderly parents, or handicapped family members (UN Women, 2021). This caregiving responsibility often delays career entry and leads to career interruptions, with long-term consequences for financial independence and retirement security
- d) **Structural inequalities in labour market-** "Maternity fines" and unequal pay structural barriers (Budig & England, 2001) remain. Employers hesitate to invest in women's career due to perceptions about limited future returns. In developing countries, the system of flexible work and the lack of affordable childcare and re-entry increase the challenges.
- e) **Psychological obstacles-** Women themselves can internal social stereotypes, which can reduce confidence, reduce salary expectations, or reluctance to pursue leadership roles (Schneidhofer, 2017). This self-limiting trust system reflects wide structural

Adjustments and Strategies by Women

Despite these challenges, more than 40 women display remarkable flexibility and adaptability when entering the task force again. A common strategy skill is upgrading, where many people carry forward education or sustainable education to update their technical and professional competencies (Capiley, 2012). With the development of online platforms and certification programs, flexible learning opportunities have expanded, making it easier for women to achieve new skills. Another important route is entrepreneurship, which provides more flexibility and autonomy to midlife women. Many female-latched start-ups are emerging in various sectors such as education, health and retail, reflecting a growing global trend (Jennings and Brush, 2013).

In addition to individual strategies, networking and mentorship workforce play an important role in facilitating re-entry. Professional networks, alumni associations and women's organizations help to create connections and make open access to job opportunities, while especially the mentorship programs designed for returns are shown to

increase the success rate of re-entry. In addition, many women choose to start their professional return through part-time or flexible roles, often in freelance or contractual abilities. This gradual infection provides a practical means

of balanced professional aspirations with the responsibilities of ongoing care, eventually paving the way for full-time employment.

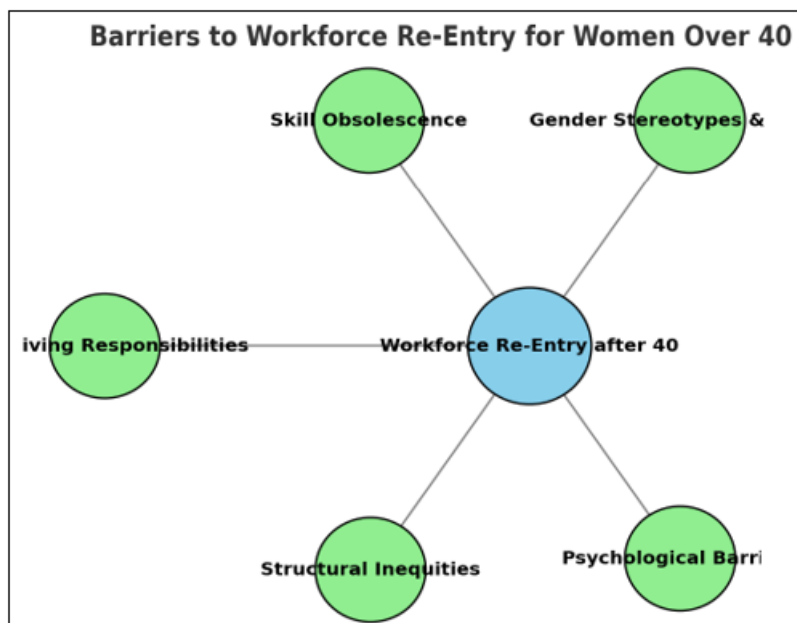


Figure 1: Barriers to Workforce Re-Entry for Women Over 40.

The diagram illustrates the key challenges faced by women re-entering the workforce after the age of 40. The central blue node represents the core issue—Workforce Re-Entry after 40. The surrounding green nodes highlight major barriers: gender stereotypes and ageism, skill obsolescence, caregiving responsibilities, structural inequities, and psychological barriers. Arrows indicate the directional influence of each barrier feeding into the central issue.

- Blue circle- Workforce re-entry after 40 (central issue).
- Green circles- Categories of barriers.
- Gray Line- Influence of each barrier on workforce participation.

Role of support systems

- Policy intervention:** Governments play an important role in enabling women's re-entry. Policies such as parents' leave, subsidized childcare and anti-discrimination law provide structural assistance (OECD, 2019). In Scandinavian countries, gender-equal policies have greatly increased the workforce participation of midlife women.
- Organizational initiative:** Corporation is fast adopting "returns-ship" programs, designed for professionals entering after a career break. Examples include Goldman Sachs' "Returns Program" and IBM's "Tech Re-Entry", which provide training and mentorship for mid-career women (Lupu & Empson, 2015).
- Community and NGO support:** Non-governmental organizations and grassroots move agitation, skill training and awareness campaigns that re-enter women's careers. For example, Siva (Self-Planned Women's Association) of India has pioneered training programs for older women in informal areas.
- Family and social support:** Family incentives and playful support are important for women navigating midlife career infections. Studies suggest that women

with assistant partners and extended family networks have high-entry success rates ((Moen et al., 2016) higher.

Global perspective

- Developed economies:** In developed countries such as the United States, Canada and Western Europe, women benefit from institutional support systems such as re-entry programs, gender equality law and more accessible higher education such as institutional support systems. Nevertheless, ageism and the glass ceiling persist, particularly in male-dominated industries (Richards, 2016).
- Developing economies:** In countries such as India, Nigeria and Brazil, structural inequalities are more pronounced. Childcare limits the infrastructure, informal labour dominance and the lack of patriarchal cultural norms, the re-entry option (Chopra, 2018). However, grassroots organizations and microfinance initiatives have empowered women to start small-scale enterprises.
- Comparative insight:** The adverse things between developed and developing nations expose that developed countries struggle more with attitudinal obstacles (agers, stereotypes), developing countries struggling with structural deficiencies (infrastructure, childcare, informal labour dominance). Both references underline the requirement of analogy interventions.

2. Conclusion

Re-recording or launching a career after 40 is not just a personal challenge, but a social issue that reflects extensive gender inequalities, cultural norms and economic structures. More than 40 women ignore the section of an important, often the workforce, which are accompanied by unused capacity for driving innovation, leadership and community

development. It is necessary to promote social justice and economic stability to address obstacles through policy reforms, organizational initiative, skill development and supporting networks. A global perspective reveals both general challenges and field-specific obstacles. The making women's careers capable of re -entering after 40 is not only about gender equality, but also about the creation of flexible, inclusive societies.

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