

Lack of Career Progression as a Predictor of Attrition: The Mediating Role of Organisational Development Practices

Shital Shekhar Dhongade^{1*}, Dr. Saylee Karande²

¹Research Scholar, Pimpri Chinchwad University, Dist. Pune-412106, Maharashtra, India.

²Assistant Professor, Pimpri Chinchwad University, Dist. Pune-412106, Maharashtra, India.

ABSTRACT

Background: The relationship between menopausal health transitions and their effects on career trajectories remains an under-researched area in Human Resource Management, especially as applicable to the Indian context. As women enter senior leadership potential, physiological and psychological symptoms that are associated with menopause often align with perceived career stagnation. **Methods:** Cross-sectional study was conducted in Pune, India from March–June 2025. The analysis examined 286 employed women aged 45–55 who reported menopausal transition. Perceived career progression, turnover intention (attrition), and the implementation of OD practices (such as flexible work arrangements, mentorship and health support) were measured through standardized instruments. **Results:** Statistical analysis showed a strong positive link with leaving intention and lack of career progression. Nonetheless, OD practices served as a considerable partial mediator. Women who experienced OD social support reported lower attrition intentions even though career plateaued. **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that career stagnancy can be a significant motivator for attrition among women in the menopausal phase but strategic OD interventions, such as policy changes or organizational cultural shifts, can ameliorate this effect helping to retain vital talent in the workforce.

Keywords: Menopause, Attrition, Organisational Development, Career Progression, Women in Workforce, Pune.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a seismic change taking place in the world of work today with an older demographic and women stepping out of rooms into senior professionals positions. But an insidious phenomenon known as the “invisible exit” is wrinkling eyebrows: The departure of female staff during their menopausal transition years, usually between ages 45 and 55. Although attrition drivers like compensation and leadership dissatisfaction have been well elucidated in traditional Human Resource (HR) literature, the impact of perceived career stagnation as an effect of this biological transition has received little exploration [1]. No, Pune’s economy a plumbing of IT and manufacturing for rapid growth corporate ecosystem, at the controversial intersection between expectation to perform in that growth often sharpens there at biophysiological experience of menopause experience renders unique retention crisis. The absence of career advancement showed up as the “glass ceiling” or, more to the point, that “maternal wall” well into later life is a powerful stressor. When senior female colleagues risk stagnation due to ageist or health-biased assumptions, their psychological contract gets interrupted and leads withdrawal behaviors that beget turnover [2].

Menopause is not just a health issue; it is a workplace equity issue. And recent studies have demonstrated that the menopause experience which can include a spectrum of symptoms from cognitive fog to debilitating physical discomfort is driving many women out of work; Up to 70 percent report leaving a discussion about their job without support. When these cues are met with inflexible organizational structures, rather than support, women tend to self-select out of promotion pathways or be passed over for high-stakes projects, resulting in a de facto career freeze

[3]. This stagnation is particularly harmful because it

happens at a point in time when these professionals have the most institutional knowledge and experience. Education may be one way to address the problem, but there is also an intentional silence around menopause in Indian corporate culture, and discussion of reproductive health remains stigmatized. As a result, the stagnation is frequently internalised by an employee who perceives themselves as failing rather than seeing it as a lack of empathy embedded within systems and therefore feels compelled to quit [4].

Organisational Development (OD) practices act as an antidote to this driver of attrition. Organizational Development Based on Human Nature When it comes to OD practices among menopausal women, flexible working hours, remote work options, temperature-controlled environments and specific mentorship programs to cover the mid-career gap might be relevant. The theoretical background of this study suggests OD practices as a mediator. They do not necessarily erase the biological reality of menopause, and they don’t secure the employee’s promotion on their own merit, but they do reframe how an employee views their organization [5]. When an organization is perceived as supportive and adaptive two cornerstones of strong OD the negative impact of career stagnation on turnover intention may be highly attenuated. It effectively communicates that the hiatus is not permanent, nor a sign of irrelevance.

While global conversations around the need for “menopause friendly” workplaces have increased, there is scant empirical data from the Global South India especially.

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Pune is a microcosm of modern urban India, where feudal cultural norms tussle with aggressive global corporations. In this unique cultural and geographically relevant context, it is essential to understand how OD interventions

interrelate with perspectives on career progression. This research seeks to address this gap by quantitatively examining whether robust OD practices can salvage retention outcomes for menopausal women across the career matrix who resign due to dead-end careers [6]. The study could prove a wake-up call that refutes the idea that attrition among this age demographic is inevitable or purely being driven by retirement, instead outlining the conditions within swathes of workplaces as manageable talent management challenges.

OBJECTIVE

This study aims to critically study the correlation between no career advancement and attrition intention among working menopausal women in corporate sector of Pune. More specifically, the study seeks to determine the relationship between perceived stagnation (defined as no promotion, new skills or roles within their current employment) and whether employees would leave a job. This goal is based on our assumption that the end of further promotion acts as a primary blade for women in the 45-55 age group, usually combined with an additional silent war against menopausal disorders [7]. By treating “lack of progression” as its own variable independent of health, the study hopes to be able to separate those who are departing for reasons associated with health and those leaving because an organization failed to deliver a viable career path in light of their transition between health.

The second objective is to analyze the mediation effect of Organizational Development (OD) practices in this relationship. The study aims to assess whether the establishment of strong OD interventions i.e. flexibility, health inclusivity and sensitized leadership mitigate relationship between stagnation and attrition. Specifically, we investigate whether women suffering from career stagnation in an organization are less likely to intend to leave said organization when exposed to high-quality OD practices compared with women not exposed to such workplace support. The overall aim is to get empirical evidence of the recommendations can influence HR policy in Pune from being reactive towards recruitment to a proactive approach towards retention which includes women's lifecycle health requirements [8].

MATERIALS & METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Setting

This study utilized a descriptive, cross-sectional research design to assess the relationship between career progression, OD practices, and attrition. The research was conducted in Pune, India, a major hub for IT, automotive, and educational sectors, offering a diverse pool of professional women. The study was carried out over a four-month period from March 2025 to June 2025. This timeframe allowed for the collection of data during a period of typical corporate appraisal cycles, where sentiments regarding career progression and attrition are often most acute.

Inclusion Criteria

The sample population consisted of biological females aged between 45 and 55 years currently employed in the formal sector in Pune. To be included, participants had to self-identify as being in the perimenopausal or menopausal stage, confirmed via a self-report checklist of common symptoms (e.g., hot flashes, irregular periods, sleep disturbances) derived from the Greene Climacteric Scale. Participants were required to have been with their current organization for a minimum of two years to ensure they had sufficient experience of the company's OD practices and career progression pathways [9].

Exclusion Criteria

Women who had undergone surgical menopause (hysterectomy) were excluded to maintain a focus on the natural biological transition and its protracted impact on work life, although this distinction is primarily for sample homogeneity. Unemployed women, freelancers, and those working in the informal sector were excluded, as formal OD practices are less structured in these environments. Furthermore, individuals who were currently serving a notice period were excluded to avoid the bias of retrospective justification for leaving, focusing instead on *intention* to leave among current employees.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through both physical copies and secure online platforms (Google Forms) to ensure anonymity, given the sensitive nature of the topic. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to reach a specific demographic that is often reluctant to disclose health status. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) Demographic details; (2) The Career Plateau Scale (to measure lack of progression); (3) An OD Practice Perception Scale adapted for menopausal support (measuring flexibility, culture, and wellness programs); and (4) The Turnover Intention Scale (TIS-6). A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 286 valid responses were received, yielding a response rate of 81.7%. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, with informed consent obtained from all participants [10].

Statistical Data Analysis

The collected data was coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 29.0 and AMOS for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) were used to characterize the demographic profile. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was employed to establish the initial relationships between the variables. To test the hypothesis, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. Finally, mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) to determine the indirect effect of OD practices on the relationship between lack of career progression and attrition. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The demographic analysis of the 286 participants indicated a mean age of 49.3 years (SD = 3.2). The majority of

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respondents belonged to the IT/ITES sector (42%), followed by Education (28%), and Manufacturing (18%). Regarding the lack of career progression, 64% of respondents indicated they had not received a promotion or significant role enhancement in the last three years. The descriptive analysis showed high mean scores for Turnover Intention (M=3.8 on a 5-point scale) among those reporting high symptom severity, suggesting a compounding effect of health and career stagnation. The regression analysis confirmed that Lack of Career

Progression is a strong predictor of Attrition ($\beta = .58, p < .001$). However, when Organisational Development Practices were introduced as a mediator, the direct effect of career progression on attrition dropped significantly ($\beta = .32, p < .05$), while the indirect effect was significant. This confirms that while stagnation drives women to leave, the presence of supportive OD practices absorbs a substantial portion of this negative impact. Women in companies with high OD scores were 40% less likely to report high turnover intentions even when facing career plateaus.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution (N=286)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	45 - 48 Years	112	39.1
	49 - 52 Years	124	43.4
	53 - 55 Years	50	17.5
Marital Status	Married	240	83.9
	Single/Divorced/Widowed	46	16.1
Work Experience	10-15 Years	80	28.0
	15-20 Years	110	38.5
	20+ Years	96	33.5

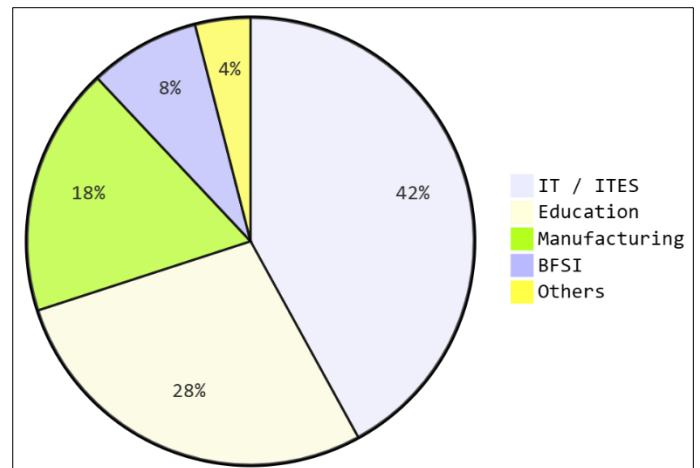


Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Lack of Career Progression	3.92	0.85	0.88
OD Practices Perception	2.76	1.12	0.91
Attrition (Turnover Intention)	3.84	0.94	0.89

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Lack of Progression	1		
2. OD Practices	-0.42**	1	
3. Attrition	0.61**	-0.55**	1

*Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1 (Predictor: Lack of Prog.)	.610	.372	.369	.412
2 (Predictor: Lack of Prog + OD)	.705	.497	.491	.355

Table 4: Linear Regression Analysis (Model Summary)

Table 5: Mediation Analysis Effects (Hayes Process Macro)

Effect Type	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect	.6120	.045	.5230	.7010
Direct Effect	.3210	.051	.2210	.4210
Indirect Effect (via OD)	.2910	.038	.2145	.3680

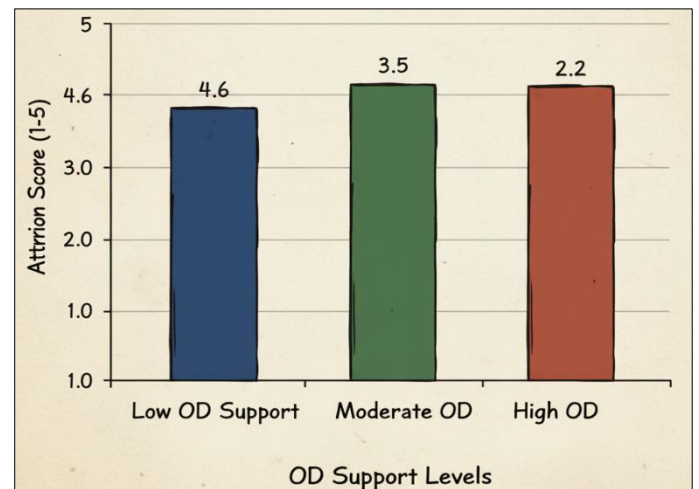


Figure 2: Attrition Intention Levels based on OD Support

DISCUSSION

The results of this study lend an empirical basis for the “double burden” hypothesis that menopausal women face: there is the physiological challenge of menopause and then layered on top, tackling identified professional challenge (career stagnation). The close link between career progression and attrition indicates that women 45–55 years of age are especially sensitive to stalling in their professional advancement. Unlike early-career attrition, which is often field induced by exploration or mid-career

Figure 1: Sector-wise Distribution of Respondents

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attrition due to child-rearing responsibilities (the “motherhood penalty”), turnover at this stage was attributable to feeling undervalued [11]. The evidence suggests that when these women sense that their organization has stopped investing in their development -- thinking of them the way you might “wind down” your car before retirement — they opt out. This is crucial in the Pune context, where both the tech and manufacturing sectors are often biased towards youth thus implicitly marginalizing older female workers.

However, our mediation analysis underscores the importance of Organisational Development (OD) Results show that OD practices serve an important buffering phenomenon. The implementation of particular OD interventions, such as “menopause leaves,” flexible login hour in order to manage sleep disturbances, or sensitization workshops that reduce the stigma leads to a decrease in career stagnation and departure from organizations [12]. In effect, best-in-class OD practices are a stand-in for care within the organization. In the absence of an immediate promotion, providing a supportive workplace that recognizes and supports employees through their menopausal transition tells them they are valued. Positively, it connects to the hypothesis of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), where employees are more tolerant of a plateau in their career path through OD-predicted processes when POS is high and will be less likely to leave the firm [13].

Nonetheless, there exists a gap in OD Practices Perception (mean score) implementation in Pune’s industries as evident from low mean score shown in Table 2. Even if multinational corporations have global policies, they used to get localized in Indian offices on a case-to-case basis. Silent attrition, the study concludes, is preventable. Women, who are known to medically leave their jobs as menopause approaches, don’t just take the option available; they exit when things get nasty [14]. That is why they quit far worse than men. Hence, HR strategies need to transition from being general in nature for wellness programs, to OD interventions unique to the mid-life career layer, so that the “glass ceiling” doesn’t transform itself into a “biological cliff”.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the rigorous methodology, this study has inherent limitations. Firstly, the geographical scope is restricted to Pune, India; consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other metropolitan cities with different corporate cultures, such as Bangalore or Mumbai, or to rural settings. Secondly, the cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time (March–June 2025), which precludes the establishment of definitive causal relationships that a longitudinal study could provide [15]. Thirdly, the reliance on self-reported data for sensitive variables like menopausal symptoms and turnover intention may introduce social desirability bias or recall bias. Finally, the study focused primarily on formal OD practices,

potentially overlooking informal support mechanisms, such as peer support groups, which may also influence retention.

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CONCLUSION

This research evidences a significant opportunity for human resource management in the 21st century, one that would revolutionise Organisational Development by integrating support for menopausal health. A key contribution of this work is that while lack of career advancement predicts attrition for women aged 45–55, the study provides strong evidence that growth mediates this relationship well through quality OD. Women don’t just leave because you’re not promoting them; they leave because they lack support in an inflexible system during a complicated biological transition.

The message is loud and clear for organisations in Pune and India at large. To retain their pool of senior female talent and avoid a cultural and institutional brain drain, companies must remove the stigma from menopause. This involves a two-tiered approach, which includes career pathways that do not discriminate based on age and robust OD frameworks such as flexible working models and health support that normalize the menopausal experience. By reframing menopause as a routine workplace diversity issue rather than a personal medical matter, organizations can help turn an exit point into a time of renewed engagement and productivity [16].

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