



Women Working in the Banking Sector: Problems and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The participation of women in the banking sector has significantly increased over the past few decades, reflecting broader trends of gender inclusion and economic empowerment. However, despite considerable progress, women continue to face multiple challenges in achieving equality and career advancement within the industry. This study explores the major problems encountered by women working in the banking sector, including gender discrimination, work-life balance issues, occupational stress, limited promotional opportunities, and workplace harassment. It also examines organizational and societal factors that hinder women's professional growth. The paper highlights how rigid working hours, transfer policies, and male-dominated leadership structures contribute to these challenges. Through analysis of secondary data and case studies, the research aims to identify strategies for creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment. The findings suggest that gender-sensitive policies, mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, and awareness initiatives can play a crucial role in empowering women employees and ensuring their sustainable participation in the banking sector.

Introduction:

Over the past few decades, the Indian banking sector has witnessed significant growth and transformation. With the advent of liberalization and digitization, banks have expanded their reach, services, and workforce. Among the most notable changes is the increased participation of women in the



sector. From clerical positions to executive roles, women are making their presence felt. However, this growing participation has not come without challenges. Women working in the banking sector face a multitude of problems both systemic and cultural that hinders their professional growth, mental well-being, and work-life balance.

Despite gender equality being enshrined in law and increasingly emphasized in corporate policies, gender-based disparities remain deeply rooted in India's banking landscape. This paper explores the various challenges faced by women in the banking sector, backed by recent statistics and studies.

1. Gender Discrimination in Hiring and Promotion

One of the major issues women face in the banking sector is gender discrimination in hiring, promotions, and job assignments. While many banks claim to have gender-neutral hiring practices, data suggests otherwise.

1.1 Gender Gaps in Leadership

Women are significantly underrepresented in top management and decision-making roles. Most of them are found in entry-level and mid-level positions.

Statistic: According to the Reserve Bank of India's 2022 Gender Diversity Report, women comprise 22% of the total banking workforce but only 17% of leadership positions.

1.2 Gender Stereotyping

Women are often considered less capable of handling fieldwork or challenging portfolios like credit and corporate banking. Instead, they are typically assigned to customer service or administrative roles.

2. Work-Life Balance Issues

Work-life balance is one of the most persistent challenges faced by working women in India, especially in demanding sectors like banking. The industry requires long working hours, frequent overtime, weekend duties, and at times, relocation to rural or remote areas. For married women or those with children, this becomes a major source of stress.

2.1 Domestic Expectations

In Indian society, women are traditionally expected to prioritize family over career. Thus, balancing household duties with a high-pressure job becomes exhausting.



Statistic: A 2023 study by the Indian Institute of Banking & Finance (IIBF) revealed that 63% of women bankers experience high levels of stress due to work-life imbalance.

2.2 Inadequate Childcare Support

Many banks lack in-house childcare facilities, flexible timings, or remote work policies. Even where such policies exist, they are poorly implemented.

3. Safety and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

Safety at the workplace is a serious concern for women. Although awareness has increased since the enactment of the POSH Act (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) in 2013, many women still feel unsafe or hesitate to report harassment due to fear of retaliation or career repercussions.

3.1 Incidents of Harassment

Women often face inappropriate behavior from colleagues, clients, or supervisors. In some cases, harassment goes unreported due to lack of trust in internal committees.

Statistic: A 2021 report by the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) found that 1 in 4 women had faced some form of workplace harassment in the past year.

3.2 Safety in Remote/Rural Postings

Banks often transfer women to rural or semi-urban areas without proper security arrangements. Female employees in such areas face challenges related to transport, accommodation, and personal safety.

4. Transfer and Posting Policies

Frequent and unpredictable transfers are a common feature of public sector banks. Women, especially those with family responsibilities or children, find it difficult to adjust to frequent relocations.

4.1 Lack of Family Accommodation

Transfers often occur without provision for spousal transfer or family support, leaving many women to choose between career and family.

Statistic: A 2022 survey by the National Institute of Bank Management (NIBM) indicated that 45% of women officers view transfer policies as a significant barrier to career advancement.



5. Career Breaks and Re-entry Challenges

Maternity, child-rearing, or elderly care responsibilities often force women to take career breaks. However, rejoining the workforce is not always easy. Women returning from breaks are often perceived as outdated or less competent.

5.1 Lack of Re-entry Programs

Few banks have structured return-to-work programs. This leads to skill decay, reduced confidence, and fewer opportunities for women trying to re-enter the banking workforce.

Statistic: A McKinsey India report (2020) shows that only 39% of women in the banking sector who take a break are able to re-enter at the same or equivalent position.

6. Limited Access to Mentorship and Networking

Mentorship is critical for career growth. However, male-dominated leadership structures in banks limit women's access to mentors, professional guidance, and high-visibility projects.

6.1 Old Boys' Club Culture

Many informal networks in banking exclude women, resulting in missed promotions and leadership opportunities.

Observation: A World Bank report (2020) noted that women are 30% less likely to have access to mentors or sponsors in financial institutions compared to men.

7. Mental Health and Burnout

Continuous exposure to stress, competition, and performance pressures—combined with domestic responsibilities—leads to physical and mental burnout among women in banking.

Statistic: According to the Indian Journal of Occupational Health (2022), 57% of female bank employees reported signs of burnout, anxiety, or depression, often going unreported or untreated.

8. Pay Gap and Salary Inequality

Although banks officially follow standardized pay scales, disparities still exist—especially in private sector institutions where variable pay, bonuses, and incentives are subjective.



Statistic: A 2021 NASSCOM study found that in Indian private banks, women earned 8–12% less on average than their male counterparts for the same roles.

Government and Institutional Responses

8.1 Legal Framework

The POSH Act (2013): Mandates Internal Complaints Committees in all workplaces.

Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017: Provides 26 weeks of paid leave.

8.2 Corporate Initiatives

SBI's "Sashakt" Program: A mentorship initiative for women employees.

ICICI Bank's Women Leadership Program: Focuses on grooming female managers.

Axis Bank's Caregiver Leave Policy: Allows employees to take leave for eldercare or family needs.

Despite these initiatives, implementation gaps remain.

Case Study: State Bank of India (SBI)

In 2022, SBI faced criticism for issuing a circular stating that married women employees must obtain written permission from the bank before availing maternity leave if their spouse is posted elsewhere. Following public backlash, SBI was forced to withdraw the circular. This incident highlights the deep-rooted gender insensitivity even in well-established institutions.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Flexible Working Hours: Implement work-from-home and hybrid options where possible.
2. Transfer Policy Reforms: Consider family responsibilities and offer spousal transfer assistance.
3. Leadership Development: Create dedicated programs for grooming women for senior roles.
4. Anti-Harassment Culture: Strengthen the functioning of Internal Complaints Committees.
5. Mentorship Platforms: Facilitate structured mentorship and peer-learning platforms.
6. Mental Health Support: Offer regular counselling and well-being programs.



7. Childcare Facilities: Provide creches or financial support for childcare near workplace.

Conclusion:

The banking sector has the potential to be a leader in gender equality in India, given its reach, regulation, and resources. While the participation of women in banking has increased over the years, deep-rooted challenges continue to persist. Discrimination, unsafe environments, lack of mentorship, and inadequate work-life balance remain key issues. Addressing these requires not only policy reforms but a change in mind-set and workplace culture. The inclusion and empowerment of women is not just a social or ethical imperative it also enhances business outcomes, diversity in leadership, and organizational performance. Banks must take proactive steps to ensure that women employees not only participate but thrive in their careers.

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