



MIDLIFE CAREER TRANSITION: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN NEW TRENDS OF SECOND CAREER AMONG FEMALES (40-50 YEARS)

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Abstract

Midlife is a construct that in recent years has been defined in a variety of ways. Throughout the literature, varying interpretations of what this developmental stage actually encompasses are still being debated. However, these impending career changes/transitions for adults are often met with a host of psychological, emotional, cultural, and physical changes that can occur during this process. According to Levinson (1996), middle adulthood/midlife is defined as "the period of life from ages 40-65". Dearth of research in the area of Midlife Career Change/Transition specifically change during midlife in the Indian context served as an impetus for the current study. The objective of the study was to elicit from females (40-50 years) (a) myths (b) benefits reaped (c) challenges faced and (d) strategies employed to overcome the challenges faced in relation to the process of midlife career change/transition in general. Sample characteristics of the participants were as follows: ages of all the participants in the study ranged from 40- 50 years ($M= 45.05$; $SD= 3.105$), substantial majority were from Hindu Community (females [86%]) and with a marital status being married (females [80%]). Large majority belonging to the nuclear family (females [78%]). The participants (females [30%]) indicated their monthly income to be in the range of Rs. 40,000 to 50,000. Results revealed that, participants indicated their myths to be (a) intra-personal, such as magically transforming lives and (b) career-related, such as starting everything from scratch; benefits reaped, such as enjoy meeting, working and motivating new people with new ideas and learn from them; good flow of income, increased salary; challenges faced, such as time management (lack, less time); managing finances was difficult (e.g. personal and family, less money in hand) due to which financial conflicts, crisis, economic concerns and issues at home aroused; and strategies employed to overcome challenges, such as managing finances by using strategies for financial planning and anticipating financial challenges in new career; developing and learning new added skill set and getting into learning mode for newness in work by doing homework, checking work-profile, having constant up gradation and shifting roles, using professional skills into the current field and being a lifelong learner.



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Introduction

We spend years planning for our careers. From kindergarten on, we never stop asking what we are going to be when we grow up. Professionals identify us as individuals from a very early age (<http://www.thegrindstone.com/2012/04/20/work-lifebalance/the-best-jobs-for-mid-life-career-change/-681/>). Career change may take place at any age across the life span. However, a critical time for a change is during middle adulthood (Bobek & Robbins, 2005; Heppner et. al; 1994);(<http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/CareerDevelopmentQuarterly/268790792.html>).

The myths, that females parse felt were, being selfish by thinking about a career change which shows up for midlife women who were taught from a young age to put others first (<http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2013/09/exposing-mythsaround-midlife-career-transition>). The real distinction between male and female-dominated careers is the pay rate: Women earn less than men across the board, from the service industry to executive jobs. But the highest paying careers are still very male-dominated, from blue-collar work to stem. And this is not very surprising, as so-called “pink-collar” careers are not typically set aside for women because they require a special set of skills that only women possess – except for giving birth, which unfortunately doesn’t pay, in most cases – but rather, because they resemble traditional roles (<http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/07/myths-women-non-traditional-employment/>). The notion of midlife as a magical transformation where housewives who have a sudden vision of the business empires they are about to build and real-life human beings are bound to feel inadequate. (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/the-existential-necessity-of-midlife-change>).

The benefits that females reaped were (a) age-related (b) intrapersonal (c) psychological and (d) career/work-related (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/theexistential-necessity-of-midlife-change>). The review of literature indicated challenges faced by females (a) personal challenges, like age, gender, health (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/the-existential-necessity-of-midlife-change>); (b) family-related (c) financial (d) career-related and (e) societal (www.positionignition.com); (<http://www.careerealism.com/mid-life-careerchange-challenges-rewards/>). Some strategies used were (a) personal strategies, such as gender, knowing oneself, keeping realistic expectations; (b) family-related (c) financial and (d) career/work-related.

Rationale of the Study

Midlife was the period chosen for the participants of this study. Perhaps no other time of life is as plagued with misinformation as middle age. “Midlife, the years between 30 and 70, with 40 to 60 at its core, is the least charted territory in human development,” psychologist Brim (1980), has written. Many people who are approaching their last decade or two of work before retiring want to spend time in a career with less pressure and more time to have a life. They want to do something meaningful, but they want to apply the experiences they have (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2014/06/29/retirement-life-reimagined-usa-today-survey/11135523/>). One of the persistent questions in economics is whether the observed differences in wages between men and women reflect discrimination or unobserved differences in productivity or tastes. One possible difference between men and women that has received relatively little attention is differences in job search and job mobility. Previous work has found that mobility among young workers is an important source of wage growth (Topel and Ward, 1992; Von Wachter and Bender, 2006); however, evidence for the U.S. and Germany suggests that young women change jobs less often than men and experience smaller gains in wages when they do switch jobs (Loprest, 1992; Fitzenberger and Kunze, 2005). Unfortunately, these findings are difficult to interpret because job movers are a select sample of workers, where the selection is often based on worker characteristics that are unobservable to the econometrician but are correlated with outcomes (Gibbons and Katz, 1991). An argument that has been offered to explain why women search longer for a new job and why women receive lower wages operate through two main channels: differences in productivity and employer discrimination (Black, 1995; Bowlus and Eckstein, 2002).

Objective of the Study

1. To elicit from adult females (40-50 years) the:
 - a) myths;
 - b) benefits reaped;
 - c) challenges faced;
 - d) strategies employed to overcome the challenges faced in relation to the process of midlife career change/transition in general.

Methodology of the Study

The research design applicable for this study was exploratory research design. The sampling technique used for the study was snowball and judgemental/ purposive sampling techniques.

Sample Size: 50 females (40-50 years).

Inclusion Criteria for Participants:

1. Working females ranging between 40-50 years.
2. Females who had made a voluntary career change/transition.
3. Those with only one-time shift (i.e. shifting from one profession to complete another).
4. Those with minimum 5-7 years of experience in their previous career and 5 years of experience in their current career.
5. Those who were graduates, lived with any type of family and/or community and irrespective of marital status.

Exclusion Criteria for Participants:

1. Females with special needs, psychologically and physically disabled.
2. Those who had multiple career changes/transitions.

Sample Characteristics: The sample consisted of 50 females. Ages of all females in the study ranged from 40-49 years ($M= 44.42$; $SD=2.815$). Substantial majority of females (86%) were from Hindu Community with a marital status being married (females [80%]). Large majority of females (78%) belonged to nuclear family. More of the females (62%) were graduates. Regarding the family monthly income level, more of the females (42%), fell in the Rs. 50,000 to one lakh income bracket. Some of the females (30%) indicated their monthly income to be in the range of Rs. 40,000 to 50,000.

The proforma was designed keeping in mind the inclusion criteria (e.g. name, age, personal status, type of family, educational qualification, previous and current career information, details of income etc.) and exclusion criteria for the participants so as to obtain the information from the working individuals ranged between 40-50 years who had made a midlife career change/transition. The semi-structured questionnaire was used for individuals who had done midlife career change where the questionnaire had questions that individual had to tick the responses given as well as the questions were kept open ended where they had to specify their response if it was not mentioned in the probes given. The reason for keeping these questions open ended was because they would provide greater variety and depth of responses.

Result of the Study

Objective 1 a): Myths, While Deciding To Make A Midlife Career Change/Transition According To Adult Females (40-50 Years)

The myths that were revealed, were classified into two categories, namely (a) intra-personal, such as transformed life magically, improved oneself (better decision making, aware of self-potentials, personal growth) (females [20%]); (b) career/work-related, such as fear of starting everything from scratch, bottom (females [4]) [Refer to Table 1]

Objective 1 b): Benefits Reaped Due To Midlife Career Change/Transition, By Adult Females (40-50 Years)

Personal Benefits

When asked, regarding the personal benefits reaped due to midlife career change/transition, the responses of the participants were classified into two categories, namely (a) intra-personal benefits, such as opportunity for inner growth (personal time, prove oneself, better person) (females [52%]); higher self-esteem (females [24%]); listening to one self and acceptance leads closer to life purpose (females [18%]); discovered self (potentialities, capabilities, creativity, strengths, weaknesses) (females [8]); (b) career/work-related benefits, such as increased knowledge (about new field) (females [2]) [Refer to Table 2]

- ❖ ***Age-related Benefits:*** Participants revealed several age-related benefits reaped due to midlife career change/ transition. The responses of some of the females (48%) indicated that they deal issues calmly with maturity and take correct decisions with comfort (better views, looking at things from novel angle, positive way, confidently, multitasking) so having a balanced outlook towards life and work [Refer to Table 2]
- ❖ ***Psychological Benefits:*** Responses of the females (60%), regarding the psychological benefits reaped due to midlife career change/transition were as, enjoy meeting, working and motivating new people with new ideas and learn from them; inner satisfaction, positivity (e.g. achieve life purpose, contribute to society) (females [20%]); a sense of fulfilment, self-belief, mental peace, feeling energetic (females [12%]) [Refer to Table 2]
- ❖ ***Family-related Benefits:*** When asked, the participants regarding family-related benefits reaped due to midlife career change/transition, the responses were as, work-life (family) balance (females [32%]); little more than one third females (36%) indicated family as a huge support system [Refer to Table 2]
- ❖ ***Career/work-related Benefits:*** Regarding career/work-related benefits reaped due to midlife career change/transition were classified into two categories, namely (a) intra-personal benefits, such as satisfying work experience improved self with lot of learning and insights (females [6]); (b) work-related benefits, such as new additional work skills

and knowledge gained and improved previous skills by using them in new career for good professional experience (females [52%]); satisfaction and growth in career due to lot of challenging opportunities at workplace (females [12%]) [Refer to Table 2]

Table 1 *Frequencies and percentages of thoughts/feelings/fears/myths while deciding to make a Midlife career change/transition, by adult females (40-50 years)*

Thoughts/feelings/fears/myths	Females (n = 50) f (%)
Intra-personal Reasons	
Transformed life magically, improved oneself (better decision making, aware of self-potentials, personal growth)	10(20)
Lucky and hard-working enough to find perfect jobs	4(8)
Everybody has a chance to transform their lives (personal will and efforts)	2(4)
Everything doesn't stay for long so change is needed even if not benefiting financially	2(4)
Try doing something because nothing is impossible	1(2)
Decision of choosing a new career felt stressed and miserable	
Career/work-related Reasons	
Start everything from scratch, bottom	2(4)
More affinity, passion towards field, updated with new industry to have better prospects	1(2)
Will not be able to do new work, learn new things, taking decision at such an age difficult	1(2)
Due to repetitive work, no previous experience, knowledge no interest in the field	2(4)
Lot of available opportunities not seen	1(2)
Financial Reasons	
Fear of losing independence and steady income	2(4)
Get enough income to overcome financial crisis	1(2)

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Table 2 *Frequencies and percentages of benefits reaped due to Midlife career change/ transition, by adult females (40-50 years)*

Benefits	Females (n = 50) f (%)
Intra-personal Benefits	
Opportunity for inner growth (personal time, prove oneself, better person)	16(52)
Higher self-esteem	12(24)
Listening to one self and acceptance leads closer to life purpose	9(18)
Discovered self (potentialities, capabilities, creativity, strengths, weaknesses)	4(8)
Patience, Confidence, positivity	6(12)
More exposure led to understanding things better and able to put emerging problems into perspective so there is change in thought process which helped to solve problems and developed willingness to take risk and face failures	1(2)
Overall personality enhanced	1(2)
Enjoy small earning from home	
Age-related Benefits	
Deal issues calmly with maturity and take correct decisions with comfort (better views, looking at things from novel angle, positive way, confidently, multitasking) so having a balanced outlook towards life and work	24(48)
Lot of time for self-assurance and motivation	8(16)
Feeling of relaxed and de-stressed often	8(16)
Work at own pace – easier work	3(6)
Regain health	1(2)
More energetic	1(2)
Psychological Benefits	
Enjoy meeting, working and motivating new people with new ideas and learn from them	30(60)
Inner satisfaction, positivity (e.g. achieve life purpose, contribute to society)	10(20)
A sense of fulfillment, self-belief, mental peace, feeling energetic	6(12)
Give best efforts in the work done with lot of interests and passion and having no fear of failure	1(2)

Table 2 continued *Frequencies and percentages of benefits reaped due to Midlife career change/ transition, by adult females (40-50 years)*

Benefits	Females (n = 50) f (%)
<i>Family-related Benefits</i>	
Work-life (family) balance	16(32)
Family as huge support system	18(36)
Happiness on everybody's face, everybody doing well	3(6)
<i>Financial Benefits</i>	
Good flow of income, increased in salary	26(52)
Conscious financial planning	1(2)
Career/work-related Benefits	
<i>Intra-personal Benefits</i>	
Satisfying work experience improved self with lot of learning and insights	3(6)
Feeling fresh	1(2)
<i>Work-related Benefits</i>	
New additional work skills and knowledge gained and improved previous skills by using them in new career for good professional experience	26(52)
Satisfaction and growth in career due to lot of challenging opportunities at workplace	6(12)
Experiences with new people to work and learn from them	2(4)
Aware of work-related strengths and weaknesses	1(2)
Networking, contacts (making new clients, friends)	1(2)

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Objective 1 c): Various Challenges Faced By Adult Females (40-50 Years) During/Due to Midlife Career Change/Transition

Personal Challenges

The personal challenges faced during/due to midlife career change/ transition, the participant's responses were less than quarter participants (22%) indicated time management (lack, less time); ten participants indicated ageing, age as a challenge. Six participants responded equally for keeping self-occupied to maintain health (fitness and young) and other six participants mentioned difficulty managing things and getting job due to more work [Refer to Table 3]

Family-related Challenges

Some of the females (44%) revealed none/no family-related challenges. Eight participants indicated family going through stress because staying away from them, giving no/less time, not taking them into confidence leading to insecurity in family [Refer to Table 3]

Financial Challenges

Little more than one third females (34%) indicated none/no financial challenges. Few of the participants (16%) mentioned managing finances was difficult (e.g. personal and family, less money in hand) due to which financial conflicts, crisis, economic concerns and issues at home aroused. Five participants stated steady growth led to irregular income [Refer to Table 3]

Career/work-related Challenges

Once again, little less than one third females (32%) responded no career/work-related challenges. Five participants indicated no/limited amount of work skills so underappreciated and establishing market became difficult. Five participants mentioned lack of fulfilment and peace because of lost sense of self-worth. While four participants mentioned no growth, promotion because of same routine, overworking, lot of challenges faced (no newness in work environment) which led to professional instability [Refer to Table 3]

Objective 1 d): Strategies Employed To Overcome the Challenges Faced During Midlife Career Change/Transition According To Adult Females (40-50 Years)

Personal Strategies

Table 4 presents the strategies to overcome the challenges faced during midlife career change/transition. As evident from the table, the responses were classified into two categories, namely, (a) intra-personal strategies, such as know one-self (come closer to oneself, strengths and weaknesses, taking time to decide things) (females [12%]); effective time management (females [22%]); having Confidence, patience, keeping faith in oneself, being self-motivated, moving towards positivity and having self-evaluations (females [2]); having realistic expectations (no preconceived notions) (females [8]); (b) career/work-related strategies, such as career planning (e.g. making a career graph, checklist of progress, career change plan) (females [18%]).

Table 3 *Frequencies and percentages of various challenges faced by respondents during/due to Midlife career change/transition*

Challenges	Females (n = 50) f (%)
Personal Challenges	
Time management (lack, less time)	13(26)
Ageing, age	5(10)
Keeping self-occupied to maintain health (fitness and young)	4(8)
Lack technological usage compared to youngsters which creates difficulty competing with younger age group	1(2)
Family-related Challenges	
Family going through stress because staying away from them, giving no/less time, not taking them into confidence leading to insecurity in family	1(2)
Family as a challenge (not supporting during transition)	1(2)
Family, friends thought field is superficial	1(2)
Accepting change in work hours	10(20)
Financial Challenges	
Managing finances was difficult (e.g. personal and family, less money in hand) due to which financial conflicts, crisis, economic concerns and issues at home aroused	1(2)
Steady growth led to irregular income	2(4)
Career/work-related Challenges	
No, limited amount of work skills so underappreciated and establishing market became difficult	4(8)
Lack of fulfillment and peace because of lost sense of self-worth	1(2)
No growth, promotion because of same routine, overworking, lot of challenges faced (no newness in work environment) which led to professional instability	1(2)
Stressed for getting job, moving to a high post because of no recognition as an independent professional	

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Table 4 *Frequencies and percentages of strategies employed to overcome the challenges during Midlife career change/transition, according to adult females (40-50 years)*

Strategies	Females (n=50) f (%)
Personal Strategies	
Intra-personal Strategies	
Know one self (come closer to oneself, strengths and weaknesses, taking time to decide things)	6(12)
Effective time management (enhancing)	11(22)
Having Confidence, patience, keeping faith in oneself, being self-motivated, moving towards positivity and having self-evaluations	1(2) 4(8)
Having realistic expectations (no preconceived notions)	
Career/work-related Strategies	
Career planning (e.g. making a career graph, checklist of progress, career change plan)	9(18)
Financial Strategies	
Managing finances by using strategies for financial planning and anticipating financial challenges in new career	19(38) 1(2)
Changing spending pattern (e.g. saving, keep expenses to minimum, reduce luxury needs)	
Career/work-related Strategies	
Developing and learning new added skill set and getting into learning mode for newness in work by doing homework, checking work-profile, having constant up gradation and shifting of roles, using professional skills into the current field and being a lifelong learner	13(26) 8(16)
Expanding professional networks and contacts by meeting expert people for advice on changing career	2(4)
Managing work by having flexibility in work type and hours of work	

Note: Multiple responses obtained

Financial Strategies

Little more than one third females (38%) mentioned managing finances by using strategies for financial planning and anticipating financial challenges in new career [Refer to Table 4]

Career/work-related Strategies

A little more than quarter females (26%) indicated developing and learning new added skill set and getting into learning mode for newness in work by doing homework, checking work-profile, having constant upgradation and shifting of roles, using professional skills into

the current field and being a lifelong learner. While very few participants (15%) stated expanding professional networks and contacts by meeting expert people for advice on changing career [Refer to Table 4]

The review indicated some myths/thoughts/feelings/fears to be the notion of midlife (Courier/Beauty/Cookery) magical transformation: This myth, the fruit of the past few decades, has been fed by countless self-help books and magazine articles, and by a general cultural atmosphere. The myth tries to sell the illusion that if people have enough vision and willpower, they can be anything or anybody they want to be. Paradoxically, this doesn't make midlife career change/transition easier, it makes them more frightening. Faced with stories of housewives who have a sudden vision of the business empires they are about to build; real-life human beings are bound to feel inadequate. They have fears, doubts, and vague ideas at best, so they'd better stick to their knitting (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/the-existential-necessity-of-midlife-change>). The findings of the current study were in congruence, where little less than quarter participants indicated midlife career change had transformed life magically, improved oneself (better decision making, aware of self-potentials, personal growth).

The review indicated benefits reaped due to midlife career change/transition as personal benefits, where at best midlife can be a time when people move from what psychologist Abraham Maslow called deficiency motivations to growth motivations. Deficiency motivations are fed by lack. People who have no food, for example, will be consumed by the need to find nourishment. Those who lack self-esteem will be driven to prove their worth. By contrast, growth motivations are fed not by a deficiency but by the human need to realize our full potential. Motivated in this way, we may try listening to ourselves in order to discover who we are and what we want. For a growing number of people, the midlife years can be a period of unprecedented opportunity for inner growth (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/the-existential-necessity-of-midlife-change>). Similarly, the findings in the current research also revealed a little more than quarter participants having opportunity for inner growth (personal time, prove oneself, better person); age-related benefits, where little more than one third participants mentioned they deal with issues calmly, with maturity and take correct decisions with comfort (better views, looking at things from novel angle, positive way, confidently, multitasking) so having a balanced outlook towards life and work. The current study is in congruence with the review which indicated age related benefits as one strength that tends to increase with age and is the ability to put emerging problems into perspective, which helps executives deal with the issues at hand much more calmly and with

much greater self-assurance (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/theexistential-necessity-of-midlife-change>); psychological benefits pointed out, most executives have learned that they really enjoy motivating people, for instance, or that the opposite is true: They enjoy working on their own and find working with others a drain of energy (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/theexistential-necessity-of-midlife-change>). Likewise, the findings in the current study also pointed out that majority of the participants enjoyed meeting, working and motivating new people with new ideas and learn from them.

A little less than quarter participants indicated time management (lack, less time) as the primary challenge. The review also indicated gender as more women are forced to make late-life career change/transition because of the ailing economy or failing industries, they are faced with a number of obstacles, the most prevalent of which is age bias and challenges related to health as people at midlife face more physical limitations. (<http://www.forbes.com/2010/05/20/career-change-middle-age-transferable-skillsforbes-woman-leadership-passion.html>). Health becomes a pervasive concern (<https://hbr.org/2008/02/the-existential-necessity-of-midlife-change>). While participants in the current study did not mention challenges related to gender and health. In the current study, only eight participants revealed family-related challenges as family going through stress because staying away from them, giving no/less time, not taking them into confidence leading to insecurity in family. Strikingly, the review revealed family-related challenge as how much manoeuvrability does one have in terms of their professional working life when it comes to considering their spouse and any children if they have? Children's education is a common reason why people do not, or cannot, make mid-career shifts, particularly when the youngsters are hitting key points in their educational journey. Increasingly, as households need a second income earner within the families, the spouse's economic working is a key consideration, even more so if the life partner has taken time off from their professional work - perhaps to raise the children when they are young (Position Ignition - 85 Mid-Life Career Change Tips); (www.positionignition.com).

The literature, regarding the strategies to overcome challenges related to midlife career change/transition indicated gender as the first strategy where gender is related in finding ways to compete with younger applicants. If a woman, learning about careers for older women where age factor is irrelevant. Also learning how to gain competitive advantages over younger job applicants (<http://www.career-testsguide.com/midlife-career-change.html>). Shockingly, in the current study, the participants did not indicate gender as a strategy to

overcome challenges. Whereas, participants indicated knowing oneself (come closer to oneself, strengths and weaknesses, taking time to decide things) as the first strategy. The review is in congruence with the current study which indicated knowing own self where most people don't know what they're good at, but midlife is a good time to figure this out. A person has a history of professional and personal experience to draw from when determining their natural strengths. Thinking about what a person truly enjoys doing, what the person does well and what they are proud of is very important (<http://careeradvice.monster.com/career-development/changing-careers/career-change-and-theseasoned-worker/article.aspx>). The review of literature indicated family-related strategy as balancing work and life where good career management helps an individual to get a desirable career and family relationship. One can stay close to family and have their career too (<http://www.career-tests-guide.com/midlife-career-change.html>). Astonishingly, in the current research, the participants did not indicate any family-related strategy.

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