

## FACTORS DETERMINING SUCCESSFUL WOMEN CAREERS

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**Abstract:** The development of a women's career is more complicated than that of a men's career, as several internal and external barriers exist, including family duties, the diversity of roles of life, employment, the surrounding environment, traditions, and stereotypes which both complicate and constraint the choice and growth of a women's career. A career is defined as a sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities, and experiences which unify a job, a career, and a profession, with the situation of being unemployed being included as well. The paper includes research results on the factors determining successful women's careers. The aim of this research was to investigate the factors determining successful women's careers. To achieve the aim, a questionnaire survey of women was conducted. Women aged from 29 to 58 years participated in the survey. In the survey, the most significant factors affecting the development of women's careers were identified; they were: educational level, psychological climate at the workplace, attitude of managers, distance between the workplace and home, and woman's age. It was found that a women's career is a whole life that includes family, leisure time, and what is done for society and for self-development. The most significant profession choice factors are: parents' opinion, need to fulfil one's potential, interest in a profession, prestige of a profession, gender role factor, orientation towards the system of social values established in the society, need for security and defence, and psychosomatic illnesses. The research results will contribute to an understanding of the factors determining successful women's careers and their role in a career life of women.

**Keywords:** women's career, job-determining factors, glass ceiling.

### Introduction

It is a positive fact that a woman thinks of her career not only as a job, but also regards it as her life. There are five interrelated areas of life to which women dedicate a lot of time, energy, duties, and attention. A key to a successful life for women is their ability to balance all these five areas of life:

- a job (it is important that every individual does a job that provides both moral satisfaction and financial stability to them);
- the family (family life is one of the most important areas of human life, therefore, it is essential that it is structured according to the individual's needs and desires);
- mentality (time and activities that people dedicate to mental growth, self-perfection and development);
- a civil society (a need to be part of the society – time and energy dedicated to other individuals, the environment, and the country);
- leisure time (leisure time and hobbies enable people to fulfil their interests that were not fulfilled at their job) (Karjeras jomas, 2004).

An opinion exists that individuals have a limited choice of profession and employment is based on gender and ethnic and social origin. As regards gender, women seemingly have no limited opportunities to choose and work in a freely chosen profession if this profession is not historically been assumed to be a profession for men or a position that may be taken by an individual of certain stereotype. In relation to a women's career and its development, the term *glass ceiling* is exploited. Johanne Toussaint writes in her works that the glass ceiling means the economic oppression of women (Toussaint, 1993). The economic term *glass ceiling* relates to an unseen barrier that limits opportunities for minorities and women to climb up the career ladder regardless of their qualification and achievements. Initially, the metaphor was applied to barriers, especially women's careers, yet, it was extended very fast to refer to obstacles that prevent women from continuing gaining success in their career. This metaphor is most often mentioned regarding women who are not able to climb up the career ladder at their job. The metaphor *glass ceiling* is an excellent way of how to describe a situation

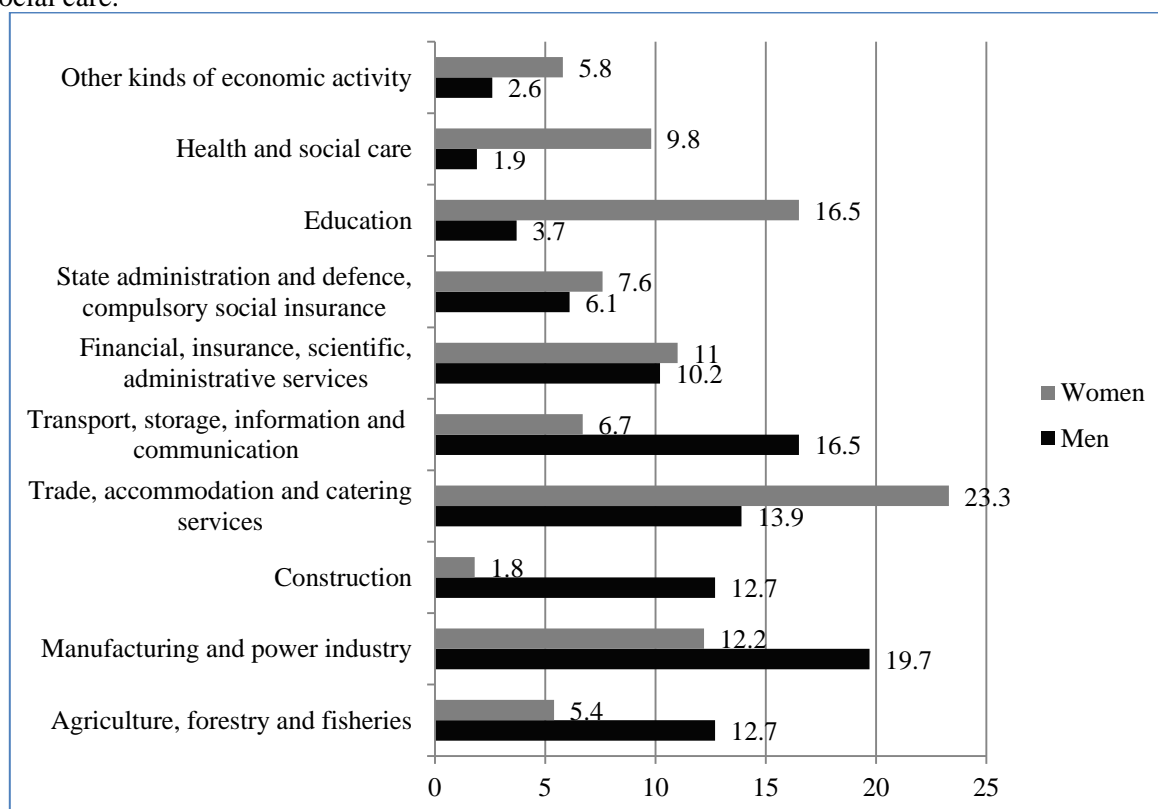
that prevents women from reaching career heights compared with men. Theoretically, nothing hinders building an upward career; a barrier is imposed by stereotypes, therefore, the explanation is that the *ceiling* is made of glass. A woman can clearly see that those who are ahead of her are stronger, but she is not able to achieve the same results; she stops in front of unseen forces not allowing her to climb up higher (Napikoski, 2012).

The *glass ceiling* includes barriers in vertical career growth, unequal wages for the same work, the loss of professionalism owing to long periods of pregnancy and child leave.

David A. Cotter defined four different distinctive features or specific criteria that have to be met to conclude that a *glass ceiling* exists. The *glass ceiling* becomes apparent as an inequality if observing:

- a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee;
- a gender or racial difference that is more specific at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome;
- a gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels (Cotter, Hermsen, 2001).

As regards equality between men and women, Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union stipulates that equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay (Eiropas Savienības..., 2007). The situation in the issues of equality between men and women in Latvia is analysed further in the research. Analysing Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) data for 2011 (Figure 1), one can find that there are areas in Latvia in which women are represented more often than men. Three areas in which the number of women is greater than that of men are: trade, accommodation, and catering services, education, as well as health and social care.

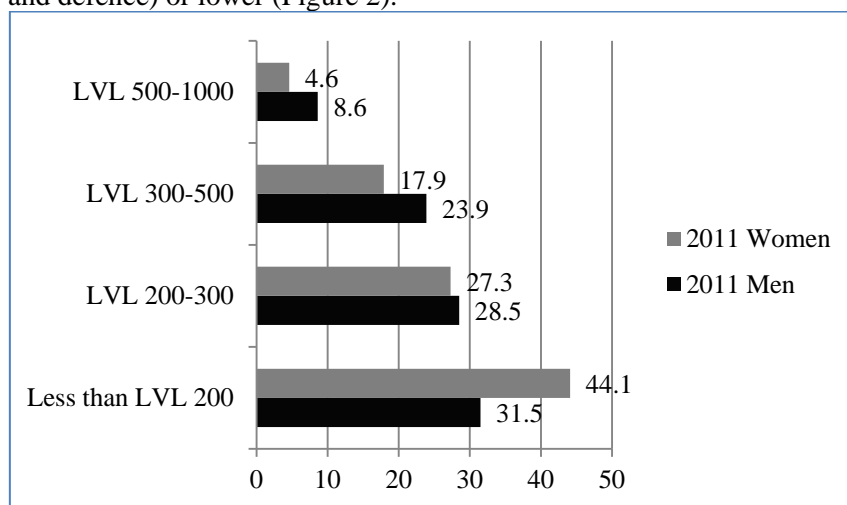


Source: author's construction based on CSB data.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of employees by kind of economic activity and by gender in Latvia in 2011.

Although women, in general, obtain higher education more often than men, yet, according to CSB data, wages of women are not greater than those of men in none of the areas (kinds of economic

activity). Their wages are either approximately the same (for instance, in construction, state administration and defence) or lower (Figure 2).



Source: author's construction based on CSB data.

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of net monthly wages (after taxes) of employees in their basic work by gender in Latvia in 2011.

The research aim of this paper is to investigate the factors determining successful women's careers.

### Methodology

A survey was conducted from 30 December 2011 to 30 January 2012 to gain insight into the factors determining successful women's careers for the purpose of effectively building and transforming a career. Women aged from 29 to 58 years participated in the survey.

This is pilot research. The research aim was to investigate the factors determining successful women's careers.

Research tasks:

1. To make a theoretical research on the factors determining successful women's careers;
2. To analyse the factors determining successful women's careers from the point of view of respondents.

To achieve the research aim and execute the research tasks, the legal framework and various information sources were exploited. A statistical research method – descriptive statistics – was employed for analysing statistical data; a sociological research method – a questionnaire survey – was employed to identify the factors determining successful women's careers. Research locations: the State Employment Agency's Jelgava Regional Department, the State Police's Zemgale Regional Department, and social networks.

### Results and discussion

The life stages of adults are characterised by higher mental, intellectual, and physical achievement trends as continuous periods of a personality's changes and growth.

The period of adulthood is classified into two stages:

- the 1<sup>st</sup> stage – the early period of adulthood (aged 20-40);
- the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage – the middle period of adulthood (aged 40-60).

The development of an adult individual depends on tackling the problems of previous periods – acquiring trust, autonomy, initiative, and love for work. Achieving personal maturity is the most essential formation in this period. Upon reaching the 2<sup>nd</sup> period of maturity, a new parameter of personality emerges – on the one hand, overall humanity, on the other hand, egoistic stagnation. E.Ericson defines overall humanity as human ability to be interested in human destinies beyond one's

own family, to think of the life of next generations, future society, and the world (Ēriksons, 1998). Identity issues are topical during all the life periods of adults, and the processes of identity formation provide continuous life experiences for adults. G.Vaillant calls this period a stage of *career consolidation*, as individuals focus on studies, the consolidation of their social status, and providing for their family (Vaillant, 1997).

Other significant profession choice factors exist:

*Parents' opinion.* Children, who are in the focus of attention of their family, permanently receiving attention, love and respect, might grow up and become very sensitive and wish the satisfaction of these needs. In the future, they might be very sensitive and wish attention and positive attitude from surrounding people. In the result, they are attracted by professions that provide opportunities to contact many people and feel their respect. Such individuals prefer a job by means of which they can help others, or they pursue professions related to culture, possibly, art or entertainment.

*A need to need to fulfil one's potential,* i.e. to achieve self-actualisation. Individuals do what, to their mind, can bring the best satisfaction and maximally promote their personality growth.

*Interest in a profession.* Sometimes this interest, which is obtained from literature, movies, and television shows, is romantic. If an individual is not prepared for this work, such a work becomes burdensome and it ends with the change of the profession.

*Prestige.* A profession is chosen based on the understanding of its prestige in the society.

*Gender role factor.* For instance, women rarely chose a career of scientist, having doubts about their abilities in working in science. They prefer professions that enable them to dedicate more time to their family (part-time employment, less efforts and time consumption, thus career growth possibilities are limited and women are paid lower wages) or traditionally "feminine" professions in the field of pedagogy or care.

*Orientation towards the system of social values established in the society,* which reflects the path that women are aware of after making their profession choice.

*A need for security and defence.* Preferring a good job with stable income and a good education with large efforts dedicated to it may be viewed as an action or motivated search for personal security.

Unfortunately, the real life shows that in case of losing a job, individuals are often subjected to depression, social conflicts arise, and they get annoyed, which requires more care from the surrounding individuals; as a result, conflict situations increase in their families. The family is not always able to understand the one who lost the job and to give support to him or her. It is hard to go through a loss of job to individuals in their middle stage of life who worked for a long period in one job and who have no experience in searching for a job. (Rācene, 2012).

In the period of adulthood, life roles, which are played in different intensities and qualities of content during various life stages of individuals, characterise the career growth of individuals.

Finding one's own identity in close relations with other people and in professional activity is the most significant task in the period of adulthood. Identity formation is a non-stop process. The best indicators of life transitions for women are their family life periods and, according to studies, women might not have crises at the age of 30, 40, and 50. A child's birth or adult children leaving the family may be often regarded as a life transition. It is hard to women to find a special man, but also their careers are started later.

Starting a professional career, women not always follow a standard model of men's careers. A greater variety of forms is specific to the development of women's professional careers compared with men's careers. Part of women prefers a traditional model of men's non-stop employment, while other women decide to give birth to a child when they have made certain achievements in their professional activity. An average woman may dedicate ten years only for bringing up her children as long as they are small, and then she has 35 years to start professional activity, make achievements, or fulfil her other personal interests. (Rācene, 2011).

Working women differ, in general, from nonworking ones in the fact that they have a stronger physical and mental health. They rarely have depressions, and they rarely are sick with somatic diseases as well as heart diseases or have digestion problems. Women who work respect themselves more. It is especially characteristic of unmarried women, but also married women get more self-confident through their professional activity, especially if their activity is supported by their husband.

There is a contrast between women orientating towards a career and those a job for whom is not the most important aspect. For some women, care for their family is an important occupation bringing satisfaction, whereas it is a burdensome activity for others. Self-respect, satisfaction with life, and the sense of oneself sharply differ between career-oriented and no career-oriented women. Women, who characterise themselves as career-oriented, by working a full day, are completely satisfied with themselves. Women who are part-time employees and have a temporary job or position that is below their qualification are less satisfied with themselves, respect themselves less, and assess their abilities lower. The features of character of those women who do not regard themselves as career-oriented are opposite. For them, self-respect and satisfaction with life do not relate to full-time or part-time employment.

Autonomy is one of the features of character that is essential in the development of women's careers. Autonomy may be characterised as a feature of character without which a woman is not able to become the leader of her life. Independence specifies the autonomy of women. Women having a high level of autonomy are mainly career-oriented, whereas those with a low level of autonomy are family life-oriented. (Miķelsone, Strods, 2008).

Thus, the middle period of life is a time when people critically assess and analyse their life. They may be satisfied with themselves if they believe that they have reached the top of their possibilities. For others, such an analysis might be painful.

To feel satisfaction with their life, people have to execute various tasks. These tasks are determined by their age, social status, position at work, family status etc. At the middle period of adulthood, these tasks are as follows (Miķelsone, Strods, 2008):

- achieving civil and social accountability;
- achieving and retaining the standard of living targeted;
- choosing appropriate kinds of activity to spend leisure time.

The present paper includes the findings of the survey on the factors determining successful women's careers. Women mostly aged from 29 to 58 years participated in this research; the age range was 29 years. Since women working at the State Police and other women who use the social network [www.draugiem.lv](http://www.draugiem.lv) as well as the author's acquaintances were selected as respondents, a trend was observed that by education, 48 % had higher education, 26 % had a master's degree, and 26 % had secondary education. Of the respondents, no one had primary or even lower education as it is usual when conducting a survey among the unemployed. It indicates that the educational level enables individuals to find and retain a job.

The respondents were asked to rank the factors determining the successful development of women's careers by their significance (Table 1).

According to the respondents' answers, educational level is in 1<sup>st</sup> place, psychological climate is in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, attitude of managers is in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, distance between the workplace and home is in 4<sup>th</sup> place, and woman's age is in 5<sup>th</sup> place.

Table 1

**Place of the factors determining successful women's careers**

Data obtained during 30 December 2011 - 30 January 2012 by anonymously questioning women,  
n=39

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Place</b>
<b>Educational level</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Psychological climate at work</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Attitude of managers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Distance between the workplace and home</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>5</b>
Number of jobs at the place of residence	6
Place of residence	7
Financial situation	8
Lifestyle	9
Physical characteristics	10
Children (their number or no children)	11
Gender	12
Family status (married, not married)	13
Family experience (experience as being parents)	14

According to the respondents, the following more factors affect successful careers of women:

- wish to achieve something;
- preconception;
- coincidence;
- social connections, influential acquaintances;
- personal features of character;
- career opportunities at the workplace;
- woman's own wishes;
- nationality;
- religion;
- competition in the labour market;
- educational level;
- support of family members and friends for the career chosen and their understanding of it;
- public opinion;
- ability to position oneself correctly;
- attitude to one's own career growth;
- wage;
- competence, communication, positivism, appearance;
- spouse's support for the career chosen as well as the bringing up of children;
- internal feeling, psychological condition;
- personal features of character (purposefulness, insistence, being enterprising, openness to acquiring new knowledge etc.);
- confidence about oneself as a capable or weak individual;
- interest in the relevant area and readiness to raise one's qualification;
- skills in planning and organising one's work and life in general;
- sense of accountability and skills to make important decisions independently.

The respondents were asked, "Which of the given personal features of character determine the successful development of women's careers" (Table 2).

Table 2

**Place of the significance effects of personal features of character**

Data obtained during 30 December 2011 - 30 January 2012 by anonymously questioning women, n=39

<b>Personal features of character</b>	<b>Place</b>
<b>Coping with complicated situations</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Purposeful</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Accurate</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Enterprising</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Trustful</b>	<b>5</b>
Sense of duty	6
Drawing logical conclusions	7
Good perception	8
Coping with mental stress	9
Making decisions fast	10
Accountable	11
Well-disciplined	12
Industrious	13
Decisive	14

According to the respondents' answers, coping with complicated situations is in 1<sup>st</sup> place, purposefulness is in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, accuracy is in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, being enterprising is in 4<sup>th</sup> place, and accountability is in 5<sup>th</sup> place.

One of the studies conducted by Dina Bite at LLU investigated *Women's Professional Careers at Small Towns*; it was found in this study that there was a strong relation between the social environment and infrastructure and the employment situation, therefore, purposeful career growth is possible for a limited number of professions and jobs. In small towns, women mostly build their professional career in the so called feminine professions – pedagogy and health care – and are mainly employed at national and local government institutions and enterprises. Various phenomena of gender segregation in small towns are determined by age and gender stereotypes. Women in small towns choose various resources in building their professional career. The attitude of neighbours often limit their activities, therefore, women in small towns have to face various barriers in their professional career. The study does not provide convincing arguments that women knowingly chose a small town as the environment where to build their professional career (Bite, 2007).

American scientist Ellena Ostrow is a life and career instructor, which is presently a very popular kind of occupation in the USA, who practises and studies women's careers and their change. Owing to her practical experience and studies, she concludes that career change at the middle age is very different from that done at the age of twenty or thirty. At the middle age, women tend to think and analyse the period between reality and dreams. Women understand and wish their life to be wholesome, as no second chance will be given (Ostrow, 2012).

After being familiarised with experiences and research papers of foreign and Latvian scientists, the author concludes that a successful women's career is promoted by the environment in which a woman lives, the family in which she has grown up, her own family, her place of residence, her possibilities for education to perfect and develop herself in various ways, and her personal features of character. A great role is played by support for her career – starting with her relatives such as the husband, children, parents and ending with her job, colleagues, and support from municipal and national governments.

**Conclusions**

1. A career is a whole life of individuals that includes their family, leisure time, and what is done for society and for self-development. There are five interrelated areas of life to which women dedicate a lot of time, energy, duties, and attention, and they are: a job, the family, mentality, a civil society, and leisure time.

2. The most significant profession choice factors are: parents' opinion, need to fulfil one's potential, interest in a profession, prestige of a profession, gender role factor, orientation towards the system of social values established in the society, need for security and defence, and psychosomatic illnesses.
3. According to the empirical study, the respondents admitted that the successful development of women's careers is affected by: educational level in 1<sup>st</sup> place, psychological climate in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, attitude of managers in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, distance between the workplace and home in 4<sup>th</sup> place, and woman's age in 5<sup>th</sup> place. By significance, the respondents ranked the personal features of character as follows: coping with complicated situations in 1<sup>st</sup> place, purposefulness in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, accuracy in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, being enterprising in 4<sup>th</sup> place, and accountability in 5<sup>th</sup> place. The most essential skills were ranked as follows: skills in organising one's work in 1<sup>st</sup> place, skills in making decisions independently in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, computer skills in text processing in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, foreign language skills in 4<sup>th</sup> place, and skills in finding solutions to problems in 5<sup>th</sup> place.
4. Autonomy is one of the features of character that is essential in the development of women's careers. Autonomy may be characterised as a feature of character without which a woman is not able to become the leader of her life. Independence specifies the autonomy of women.

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