

Research Paper

Navigating Challenges and Transition: Women and ‘Midlife Crisis’ within Bangalore's IT Industry

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores the complex phenomenon of *midlife crisis* among women working in Bangalore's IT industry, focusing on their psychological, physiological, and social transitions during this key life stage. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women professionals aged 40–55, the study captures rich, firsthand narratives about identity crises and shifts, emotional struggles, career dilemmas, and the interplay between menopause and *psychological well-being*. The findings reveal recurrent themes of self-reflection, personal growth, mental conflict, and coping strategies specific to women balancing demanding careers with evolving family responsibilities. Results highlight persistent continuing challenges—including insufficient organisational support, cultural expectations, and gender bias—while also documenting sources of strength such as family, peer networks, and adaptive coping mechanisms. The study draws attention to critical research gaps and the need for directed workplace policies, mentorship, and empathy in general to support women in midlife crises/transitions. By putting together women's lived experiences within a comprehensive developmental and cultural context, this research contributes valuable insights to the fields of psychology, organisational behaviour, and gender studies, highlighting midlife as a period of both vulnerability and transformation.

Keywords: *Midlife Crisis in Women, Psychological Well-being*

A midlife crisis is a transitional phase generally occurring between the ages of 40 and 55, marked by emotional turbulence and self-reflection as individuals reassess life achievements, identity, and future goals. This period often brings feelings of restlessness, anxiety, dissatisfaction, and a strong desire for significant change. People confront ageing, mortality, and shifts in personal and professional roles, which may lead to deep questions about life's meaning, purpose, and regrets over past decisions or missed opportunities.

From a psychological perspective, symptoms of a midlife crisis can include increased anxiety, mood fluctuations, boredom, and a sense of disconnection from one's life or relationships. Stressful external events like career transitions, children leaving home, or health problems can intensify these feelings.

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Despite challenges, midlife can be a time of personal growth and transformation when approached with self-awareness, emotional resilience, and adequate support. Managing this period often involves embracing change, setting meaningful goals, and balancing life's demands with self-care. Accepting midlife as a natural and positive phase helps individuals move through it constructively rather than feeling overwhelmed.

In today's fast-paced world, midlife crises remain relevant yet evolving in their understanding and experience. It is influenced by biological, psychological, and social changes such as career shifts, changing family dynamics, health concerns, and fears of being replaced by younger, technologically adept peers. Economic uncertainties, job insecurity, and retirement preparation also contribute to anxieties. Social media exposes individuals to diverse life paths, leading to comparisons and possible feelings of inadequacy. These compounded stresses may cause midlife challenges to emerge earlier when compared to a few decades back.

It is important to understand that not everyone undergoes a crisis at midlife; for some, it is a smooth transition marked by growth and self-discovery. Additionally, cultural context shapes the experience profoundly, resulting in diverse midlife understandings globally.

Psychological Theories

Several psychological theories provide perspectives on midlife crisis.

- **Carl Jung** saw it as a spiritual and psychological transformation called individuation, shifting focus from external achievements to inner growth.
- **Elliott Jaques** coined the term "midlife crisis" in 1965, describing it as a depressive phase prompted by awareness of mortality and life's limits, often sparking emotional disturbances and attempts to reclaim youth.
- **Gail Sheehy** framed midlife crises as critical passages involving anticipated transitions, offering pathways for growth, redefinition, and adaptation, especially for women juggling evolving roles.

About the study

This study focuses on a distinct group: women in urban Bangalore, India, who began their careers in the IT sector 20+ years ago. These women represent the first generation in India encouraged to pursue higher studies in sciences and technology, and competitive professional arenas, moving beyond traditional domestic roles. They have crafted independent identities and assumed responsibility for their personal and professional paths. Many have balanced sustained careers with homemaking or shifted between roles to support family.

The journey of these women reflects the massive social transformations India has witnessed in the last 25 years. With 15-20 years of adult life behind them, many find themselves at crossroads, facing unique challenges. The absence of relatable role models in previous generations and limited familial support increases uncertainty. Institutional barriers such as the glass ceiling, work-life balance struggles, and deep self-reflection on life purpose and career choices heighten these challenges.

The study aims to document and analyse these complex midlife transitions, providing insights into how gender, work, psychological adaptation, and evolving societal norms intersect in contemporary urban India.

Rationale for the study

Midlife remains the least studied human developmental period, unlike childhood, adolescence, or old age, which have dedicated research and professional focus. In many societies, awareness that women experience midlife crises similar to men, alongside menopause and other life changes, is limited. Midlife crises in women are often misattributed to perimenopausal symptoms or solely linked to empty nest syndrome, despite occurring earlier and involving complex psychological factors.

Biological changes during menopause play a significant role in the midlife experience for many women, affecting both physical and mental health, and these changes, along with menopause, often coincide with life stressors such as loss of parents, children leaving home, and career transitions, amplifying emotional sensitivity and self-reflection. For some, menopause intensifies feelings of invisibility or societal pressure, alongside challenges of balancing family and career responsibilities. Research also highlights the mid-career crisis frequently observed in midlife, marked by dissatisfaction, identity questioning, and realignment of career and personal goals.

More studies are crucial to understand and address the structural, occupational, and social factors impacting midlife women's mental and physical health, and expanded research will help create supportive measures for women navigating midlife crises and balancing career and family.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature available on this research study of Midlife Crisis in Women examined the central role that midlife plays in an individual's life. It also examined the psychological consequences and subsequent effects on individual well-being, as well as a range of coping strategies adopted during this transitional phase. The study considered different theories developed on the effects of midlife crisis in general and women in particular. Finally, it explored how a person dealt with the midlife transition/crisis before starting the study through a literature review. List of some key papers reviewed among the many for the study

Research on midlife crisis in Indian men and women presents mixed findings. One study, **An Exploratory Study of Differences in Development Concerns of Middle-Aged Men and Women**, *Tikoo Minakshi* suggests no significant midlife crisis in India, with men and women differing only in self-reflection and health concerns. The men and women differed only in their response to the self-reflection and health domains of the Men's Adult Life Experiences Inventory.

However, other studies indicate the presence of midlife challenges. **The Midlife Crisis - "Her" Experience**, a study conducted in the year 2020 by *Rawat Swati* and *Dr Srivastava Manini*, concludes that non-working Indian women experience higher depression levels during midlife compared to working women. The study aims to determine the differences in mental health between middle-aged working and non-working women in India.

Lachman E. Margie, in her paper, **Development in Midlife**, shares her research that the field of midlife development is emerging in the context of large demographic shifts in the population. Her research uses conceptual frameworks useful for studying the multiple patterns of change in midlife. Findings demonstrating patterns of gains and losses are reviewed for multiple domains: cognitive functioning, personality and the self, emotions,

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social relationships, work, and physical health. Further, she recommends that, need for future research to illuminate and integrate the diverse aspects of midlife is highlighted.

Another research paper, developed to list down opportunities and challenges - **Midlife in the 2020s: Opportunities and Challenges**, by *Infurna J Frank, Gerstorf Denis, Lachman E Margie*, discusses issues of diversity and notes similarities and differences in midlife experiences across race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The author considers midlife as a pivotal period that includes a focus on balancing gains and losses, linking earlier and later life periods and generations. The paper proposes possibilities for promoting reversibility and resilience with interventions and policy changes. The findings recommend that future research promises to re-conceptualise midlife as a key period of life, with a concerted effort to focus on the diversity of midlife experiences to meet the unprecedented challenges and opportunities in the 2020s and beyond.

Midlife and Mental Health, a research paper by *Carr Deborah*, Boston University, identifies sources of midlife stress that may affect mental health, including mental dissolution, caregiving strains, work-related stressors, young adult children's problems, and physical health changes.

Research paper specific to Indian demography, **Midlife Crisis in Indian Men and Women**, by *Hazral Brindashree, Prof. Chatterjee Dipanjana*, empirically studies the association between midlife crisis and depression, worry, and quality of life in Indian men and women. Their research concludes that Indian men and women have a major impact on depression, quality of life, and worry. They further state that effective management allows for 'Growth', whereas ineffective coping or mismanagement results in 'Crisis'. Accordingly, a Midlife Crisis can thus hurt an individual's mental health, particularly on the dimensions of anxiety, depression, and stress.

METHODOLOGY

The research aims to answer how midlife affects women's lives, their balance of work and family, mental conflicts, cultural influences, and coping methods. A qualitative research approach was chosen to explore 'how' and 'why' questions, enabling a detailed understanding of participants' experiences. This method uses in-depth interviews to gather rich, descriptive data and identify patterns or themes. The study used semi-structured interviews, offering flexibility for participants to fully express their thoughts while allowing the interviewer to guide the conversation.

Purposive sampling was used; the researcher selected the participants who fit the criteria relevant to the study - women aged 40-55, currently working or recently working in Bangalore's IT industry, and experiencing midlife transition. The study included 10 women who brought diverse perspectives related to work, family, health, and personal growth.

Data collection took place via online video calls, with interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions covered demographics, emotional well-being, relationships, health, and future outlook, with room to explore individual stories extensively. For data analysis, transcripts were reviewed thoroughly, coded, and grouped into themes to identify common experiences and unique variations. This thematic analysis helped interpret psychological and social dimensions of midlife challenges.

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A narrative style of writing was adapted to retain the original qualitative and descriptive nature of the experiences, focusing on rich and detailed personal stories. This helped the researcher to emphasise the voices of the participants, capturing their emotional, psychological, social, and professional journeys through the midlife phase/crisis. The style is empathetic and reflective, weaving together participant quotations and thematic analysis to highlight common patterns, conflicts, and coping strategies.

Ethical care was prioritised; all participants gave informed consent and could skip uncomfortable questions or withdraw anytime. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, with no real names or identifiers revealed.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the small number of participants makes it difficult to generalise the findings to a larger population. Research with more participants would offer a broader analysis. However, the semi-structured interview method used helped to collect detailed and meaningful information from each participant. Although this approach takes time, it allows for open and honest conversations, providing deep insights into the women’s personal experiences and well-being.

Another limitation is the risk of researcher bias, which is common in less structured research methods like interviews. The researcher worked carefully to minimise bias, and the researcher believes that the findings remain valid and can be applied more widely.

Finally, qualitative data collected in the study allow for broader interpretation, unlike numerical data, which is stricter and more limited. This flexibility means that the findings offer rich, descriptive insights and allow for future research initiatives.

Overall, the study provides a valuable, in-depth understanding of midlife transition/crisis experiences among women in Bangalore’s IT sector.

Instruments

1. The study used semi-structured interviews, offering flexibility for participants to fully express their thoughts while allowing the interviewer to guide the conversation.
2. A pre-prepared Questionnaire was used to guide the conversation during interviews, but the questions were tweaked as per the profile of the interviewer, and additional questions were asked impromptu to document rich experiences.

Procedure

Purposive Sampling method was used where participants were selected who fit the criteria relevant to the study—women aged 40-55, currently working or recently working in Bangalore’s IT industry, and experiencing midlife transition/crisis. The study included 10 women who brought diverse perspectives related to work, family, health, and personal growth.

Each of the participants was contacted, sought an appointment with, and a semi-structured interview was conducted. The interviews were recorded after seeking permission from the participant. Before starting the interview, the participant was briefed about the study and assured that the information shared would remain confidential, and the participant was free not to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable.

RESULTS

This study highlights the complex psychological, social, and biological challenges faced by women representing Bangalore's IT industry who are transitioning through the Midlife phase. The participant's many experiences were in line with the perspectives provided by the renowned psychological theories.

Many experienced identity crises and have made a successful identity shift through coping mechanisms. Some identified recurring themes among the participants were – self-reflection & growth, identity crisis & emotional struggles, and physical & mental health challenges. A positive pattern seen all through the semi-structured interviews was that the participants demonstrated significant personal growth and empowerment through self-reflection and coping strategies, and have received tremendous support from the family, peers and friends during the transitional phase.

Regarding work-life balance and professional growth, most participants reported inconsistent career advancement. The contributing factors included gender bias, unsupportive male supervisors, inflexible organisational policies, and—in some cases—the organisational glass ceiling, all of which restricted women's professional progression.

The findings emphasise the urgent need for targeted organisational policies, including mentorship, flexible work options, and stigma-free support systems, to better assist women navigating midlife transitions, which holds good in the case of men going through midlife crises too. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of midlife as both a vulnerable and transformative period, calling for culturally sensitive approaches to promote well-being and career sustainability for professional women.

DISCUSSION

The qualitative research method helps present a detailed analysis of midlife transitions, experiences, and crises faced by the ten participants of the study. The study reveals how midlife affects multiple aspects of life, particularly psychological and physiological well-being.

Participants openly shared their struggles, acknowledged their feelings. Each participant's journey is unique to their life circumstances, but most of them went through the phases of self-reflection, identity crisis & emotional struggle, differing levels of depression, and low self-worth at times. Many wrestle with the feelings of burnout and stress of balancing work and family. Despite this, some expressed positive growth and introspection, viewing midlife as a time for personal development and meaningful change.

For several participants, the questioning of their own identity and purpose during midlife was intense. Loss of career momentum and increased family responsibilities led to confusion and the search for new meaning beyond work. This identity shift created mental conflicts and emotional exhaustion.

In addition to psychological challenges, many women faced biological changes like menopause, which brought physical symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings, and fatigue. These symptoms added to their stress and affected productivity and relationships. Family and social support emerged as important for managing midlife challenges. Most women reported receiving empathy and understanding from close family, which helped them cope.

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However, societal expectations and gender bias in workplaces remained significant barriers. Gender discrimination often limited career growth for many participants and forced some women to take breaks or change jobs. The participants highlighted the need to address these biases for better workplace equality. A few of the participants have learnt to ignore the biases as a coping mechanism and focus on their individual bigger goals.

Coping strategies varied from exercise and yoga to journaling and emotional freedom techniques. Open communication and setting boundaries were also essential in managing stress. Participants recommended that organisations improve support systems, including flexible work options, menopause awareness programs for men and women, mentorship, and mental health counselling. Creating a stigma-free environment around midlife issues could help retain experienced women professionals.

Thematic Analysis

Some key themes and recurring concepts in this study align closely with established psychological theories on midlife. Almost all participants experienced these challenges to varying degrees.

Recurring Themes

- **Self-reflection and Growth** – Participants engaged deeply in self-reflection about their lives, careers, and identity, leading to significant personal growth and value realignment. Many participants reprioritised their values and made necessary changes to align their lives with these new priorities.
- **Identity Crisis and Emotional Struggles** – Many questioned their identity, with increased self-awareness leading to emotional turmoil, feelings of worthlessness, and motivation shifts. Identity crisis leading to identity shift was a recurring theme among the participants.
- **Physical & Mental Health Changes** – Menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, mood swings, and fatigue were common and influenced day-to-day functioning, with participants distinguishing between the effects of menopause and stress.

Patterns in Personal Growth

Reflection and coping strategies such as art, yoga, meditation, journaling, and prioritising mental health helped participants find empowerment. Key growth patterns included prioritising self-care, skillfully navigating workplace challenges, redirecting energy towards family when leaving work, and seeking personal liberation through menopause and self-awareness. These routes varied but led to similar outcomes of empowerment and balance.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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