

Work-Life Balance, Organizational Support, and Career Aspirations among Female Public Sector Employees: A Literature-Based Study

Nafis Fathur Rizki^{1,*}, Qurrata A'yun²

¹Perbanas Institute

²Ministry of Finance

*Corresponding author: nafisfathurrizki.work@gmail.com

Article history

Received:
07-10-2026

Accepted:
15-10-2026

Published:
29-10-2026

Copyright ©
2022 Management
Research Studies
Journal

Open Access

Abstract

Women's career advancement in the public sector is often discussed through the lens of representation, meritocracy, and leadership opportunity. However, less attention has been given to how female employees themselves evaluate career development within the everyday realities of work-life balance, organizational support, family responsibilities, and mobility requirements. This study examines how work-life balance and perceived organizational support shape career aspirations among female public sector employees in Indonesia. Using a literature-based qualitative design, the study integrates insights from public administration, human resource management, organizational behavior, and gender studies. It is supported by exploratory survey data from 1,300 female employees in an anonymized Indonesian public sector organization and publicly available secondary data. The survey shows that 565 respondents, or 43.5%, expressed interest in career development, while 735 respondents, or 56.5%, did not currently express such interest. Thematic coding of 563 usable open-ended responses further identifies key expected supports, including career and competency development, family-sensitive placement and mobility policy, childcare and family support, supervisor support and mentoring, adequate facilities, flexible work arrangements, fairness, and wellbeing support. The findings suggest that women's career aspiration is not absent, but conditional, contextual, and ecosystem-dependent. Career advancement is evaluated not only as an individual achievement, but also as a decision shaped by organizational risks, family compatibility, supervisory support, and perceived fairness. This study contributes by integrating literature-based analysis with exploratory empirical evidence and argues that public sector organizations should move beyond formal equality toward a gender-responsive work ecosystem that enables sustainable career participation and advancement for female employees.

Keywords: work-life balance, organizational support, career aspiration, female employees, public sector, gender-responsive work ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION

A gender-responsive work ecosystem refers to an organizational environment that recognizes the different experiences, needs, constraints, and aspirations of employees across gender groups and translates such recognition into inclusive policies, supportive leadership practices, fair career systems, and enabling workplace cultures. In public sector organizations, this concept is particularly important because the state is not only an employer but also a model of institutional fairness, meritocracy, and public accountability. A gender-responsive work ecosystem is therefore not merely a matter of welfare or representation; it is closely related to organizational effectiveness, talent sustainability, and the ability of public institutions to retain and develop diverse human capital. When the workplace ecosystem fails to accommodate the realities faced by female employees, especially those related to family responsibilities, mobility, relational support, and career uncertainty, organizations may experience lower motivation, reduced participation in leadership pipelines, and a weaker sense of organizational belonging (McKinsey, 2026).

Women's participation in the public sector has increased in many countries, including in administrative, professional, and technical roles. The public sector is often perceived as a relatively stable and rule-based employment setting, offering formal career paths, standardized personnel management, and clearer protection compared to informal or private employment sectors (Datta & Kotikula, 2016). However, formal equality in employment rules does not always result in substantive equality in career experience. Female public sector employees may still encounter structural and relational barriers, such as gendered expectations around caregiving, limited access to mentoring, unequal exposure to strategic assignments, mobility constraints, and organizational cultures that implicitly reward constant availability (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). These conditions may shape not only women's career progression but also their comfort, confidence, and willingness to pursue higher responsibilities.

The issue becomes more complex in geographically dispersed public sector offices, including vertical or regional offices that operate across different territorial, administrative, and socio-cultural contexts. Compared with headquarters-based work arrangements, geographically dispersed offices may involve more varied working conditions, different levels of access to decision-makers, uneven availability of developmental opportunities, and stronger dependence on local managerial practices. For female employees, these conditions may intersect with family responsibilities, mobility considerations, safety concerns, and the availability of social support systems. Therefore, career aspiration in the public sector cannot be understood merely as an individual preference or ambition. It is shaped by how employees experience the broader work ecosystem in which they are placed, supported, evaluated, and developed.

Work-life balance is one of the central constructs in understanding this issue. It refers to the extent to which employees are able to manage work and non-work responsibilities without persistent conflict, exhaustion, or psychological strain. In the public sector, work-life balance is not only influenced by workload but also by formal policies, supervisor support, flexibility, leave arrangements, family-friendly culture, and the predictability of work demands. Feeney & Stritch (2019) show that family-friendly policies and organizational culture matter for work-life balance in the public sector, although their effects may differ by gender. Similarly, Yang and Islam (2021) find that job stress and role conflict negatively affect civil servants' work-life balance, while workplace support and family-supportive policies help improve it. Recent studies also indicate that family-friendly policies can enhance wellbeing through work-life balance and organizational commitment (Ko, 2024), while employee involvement may not always produce positive outcomes if it undermines employees' ability to maintain balance (Palumbo, 2024).

Perceived organizational support is equally important. It refers to employees' perception that the organization values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing. In public organizations, this support can appear through supervisor support, mentoring, fair personnel systems, learning opportunities, family-friendly policies, and supportive manager-employee relationships. Jin & McDonald (2017) demonstrate that supervisor support influences employee engagement directly and indirectly through perceived organizational support, while learning opportunities strengthen the relationship between support and perceived organizational support. Bao & Zhong (2019) further show that perceived organizational support can buffer the negative effects of stress and emotional exhaustion among public sector employees. Support is also relational and gendered: Hatmaker & Hassan (2023) find that women may perceive different levels of managerial support depending on gender congruence and relationship quality with managers. These findings suggest that organizational support is not a single policy instrument, but a multilevel resource that shapes employees' psychological security, motivation, and career-related behavior.

Career aspiration among female public sector employees is a multidimensional concept. It includes the desire for promotion, readiness to accept broader responsibilities, willingness to participate in leadership development, confidence in navigating career systems, and perceived compatibility between career

advancement and personal life. Studies on gendered ambition in public administration show that women's advancement is influenced not only by qualification and experience but also by ambition, certification, and organizational pathways (Maranto et al., 2019). Choi (2019) emphasizes the importance of social capital, supervisor support, mentoring, and networks in women's career advancement. Bishu et al. (2023), using the Kaleidoscope Career Model, show that women public managers' career needs are shaped by balance, authenticity, and challenge, with balance emerging as a highly salient issue across generations. In Indonesia, McLaren et al. (2023) highlight that women's civil service leadership progression is shaped by family support, interpersonal relationships, education, aspirations, and socio-organizational constraints. These studies indicate that women's career aspirations are formed through the interaction between personal motivation, relational support, and organizational conditions.

The state of the art shows that the literature has moved beyond a narrow assumption that women's career development is determined only by individual ambition or formal equality. Recent research increasingly recognizes that women's public sector careers are shaped by a layered ecology of formal support, informal support, organizational culture, mentoring, gendered expectations, and career-stage dynamics. D'Agostino et al. (2022) show that second-generation gender bias may be embedded in organizational narratives, practices, and policies, thereby shaping women's career progression in subtle but consequential ways. Finkel et al. (2023) find that leadership training can help reduce gender gaps in public management advancement. Kim et al. (2026) further demonstrate that women's career goals may shift dynamically after promotion or non-promotion, indicating that career aspiration is not static but responsive to organizational experiences. Meanwhile, (Ali et al., 2025) conclude that work-life balance remains closely linked to women's career motivation, although the field remains context-fragmented and under-theorized.

Despite these developments, an important research gap remains, figure 1. Existing studies often examine work-life balance, organizational support, and women's career aspirations in separate streams. The work-life balance literature frequently focuses on wellbeing, stress, engagement, or organizational commitment, while the organizational support literature tends to examine engagement, exhaustion, or retention. At the same time, studies on women's careers often focus on ambition, leadership progression, promotion, or barriers to advancement. Few studies integrate these three constructs into one framework that explains how work-life balance and organizational support jointly shape female public sector employees' career aspirations, particularly in the context of geographically dispersed public sector offices. This integration gap limits the ability of public sector organizations to understand why competent female employees may remain hesitant, selective, or ambivalent in pursuing career advancement.

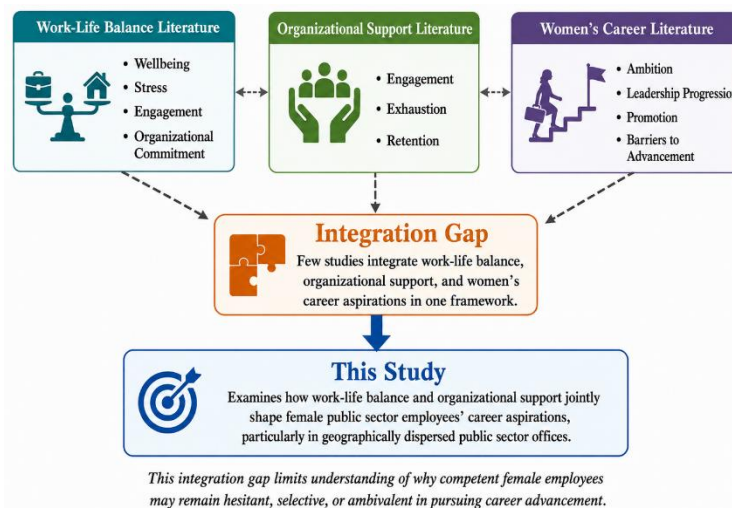


Figure 1. Research Gap in the Existing Literature

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative and contextual perspective. Rather than treating career aspiration as a purely individual psychological attribute, this article conceptualizes it as an outcome shaped by the interaction between work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and gendered organizational context. In particular, this study focuses on female public sector employees in Indonesia, where public organizations operate through geographically dispersed offices across diverse regional, administrative, and socio-cultural settings. This context is important because women's career aspirations in the public sector may be influenced not only by formal personnel systems, but also by mobility requirements, family responsibilities, local workplace cultures, supervisory support, and access to developmental opportunities.

This study aims to examine how work-life balance and organizational support contribute to female public sector employees' career aspirations in Indonesia and to identify the managerial implications for building a more gender-responsive work ecosystem. This study contributes by integrating literature-based analysis with exploratory survey evidence from an anonymized Indonesian public sector organization, highlighting how female employees' career aspirations are shaped by work-life balance, organizational support, and mobility-related career considerations. The expected contribution is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this article bridges adjacent literatures on work-life balance, organizational support, and women's career development in public administration by situating the discussion within the Indonesian public sector context. Practically, it provides insights for public sector leaders and human resource managers in designing more supportive policies, leadership practices, mentoring systems, and career development pathways that respond to the realities faced by female employees, particularly those working in geographically dispersed public sector offices.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The Methods section explains the literature-based research design, exploratory survey evidence, and the use of secondary data as contextual support. The Results and Discussion section synthesizes the literature and survey findings on work-life balance, organizational support, and female career aspirations, followed by an integrated discussion on gender-responsive work ecosystems in Indonesian public sector organizations. The Conclusion section presents the main arguments, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

METHODS

This study uses a literature-based qualitative design supported by exploratory survey data and secondary data analysis. This approach was chosen to integrate existing studies on work-life balance, organizational support, and career aspirations among female public sector employees, while also providing contextual insight from the Indonesian public sector.

The literature was collected from peer-reviewed journal articles in public administration, public management, human resource management, gender studies, and organizational behavior. The review focused on studies discussing work-life balance, perceived organizational support, supervisor support, family-friendly policies, mentoring, women's career aspirations, career advancement, leadership progression, and gendered organizational context. Priority was given to studies published within the last ten years, while older sources were used only when they provided foundational concepts.

The literature was selected based on four criteria. First, the study had to discuss at least one of the main constructs: work-life balance, organizational support, or women's career aspirations. Second, it had to be relevant to public sector organizations or women's career development. Third, it had to provide a theoretical, empirical, or conceptual contribution to the topic. Fourth, it had to be published in a reputable academic outlet. Studies were excluded if they focused only on private sector contexts without clear relevance to public organizations or did not address gender, career, or organizational support issues.

To complement the literature review, this study uses anonymized exploratory survey data collected from female employees in an Indonesian public sector organization. The use of the survey data was authorized by the relevant internal data owner, and the organization is not identified in this article to protect institutional confidentiality. The survey was conducted to capture female employees' career development aspirations and the organizational support systems expected to facilitate their career growth. A total of 1,300 female employees participated in the survey, representing 56% of the female workforce in the organization.

The survey data are reported only in aggregate form. No personally identifiable information, individual-level attribution, office location, or specific organizational unit is presented. The survey contained closed-ended and open-ended items related to career preferences, reasons for interest or lack of interest in career advancement, demographic characteristics, and expected organizational support systems. The open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns related to career aspirations, work-life balance, family responsibilities, placement and mobility, career development, supervisor support, workplace facilities, and inclusive work culture. The survey findings are used as exploratory empirical evidence to enrich the literature-based analysis, not as statistically generalizable findings for all female public sector employees in Indonesia.

This study also uses publicly available secondary data to provide broader context on gender equality, women's employment, public sector workforce composition, and women's representation in managerial or leadership positions. The data were drawn from official statistics and institutional reports, including national statistical agencies, civil service statistics, and reports from international organizations such as the World Bank, OECD, UN Women, ILO, and World Economic Forum. These data were used descriptively through tables or figures to strengthen the contextual background of the study.

The analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis. The literature, survey themes, and secondary data were organized into three main analytical categories: work-life balance in public sector employment, organizational support as a multilevel resource, and women's career aspirations and advancement in public organizations. These categories were then synthesized to develop an integrative framework explaining how work-life balance and perceived organizational support may shape female public sector employees' career aspirations in the Indonesian public sector context.

This study has several limitations. First, the narrative literature review does not claim to cover all studies on the topic. Second, the survey data come from one anonymized public sector organization and therefore cannot be generalized to all female public sector employees in Indonesia. Third, the exploratory survey data provide contextual insights but do not allow causal testing. Fourth, the use of anonymized organizational data limits the level of institutional detail that can be discussed. Nevertheless, this approach is suitable for developing a contextual and integrative understanding of female employees' career aspirations and for identifying managerial implications for a more gender-responsive work ecosystem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The survey involved 1,300 female employees from an anonymized Indonesian public sector organization, representing 56% of the female workforce in the organization. The findings show a divided but analytically meaningful pattern of career aspiration. A total of 565 respondents, or 43.5%, expressed interest in developing their careers, while 735 respondents, or 56.5%, did not express interest in career advancement at the time of the survey. This finding should not be interpreted simplistically as evidence of low ambition among female employees. Rather, it suggests that women's career aspiration in the public sector is conditional and shaped by the perceived costs, risks, and support structures associated with career advancement.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of respondents' interest in career development. The figure shows that the majority of respondents did not currently express interest in career advancement. However, this descriptive pattern should be understood carefully. The issue is not merely whether female employees aspire to advance, but under what organizational conditions they are willing and able to sustain such aspiration.

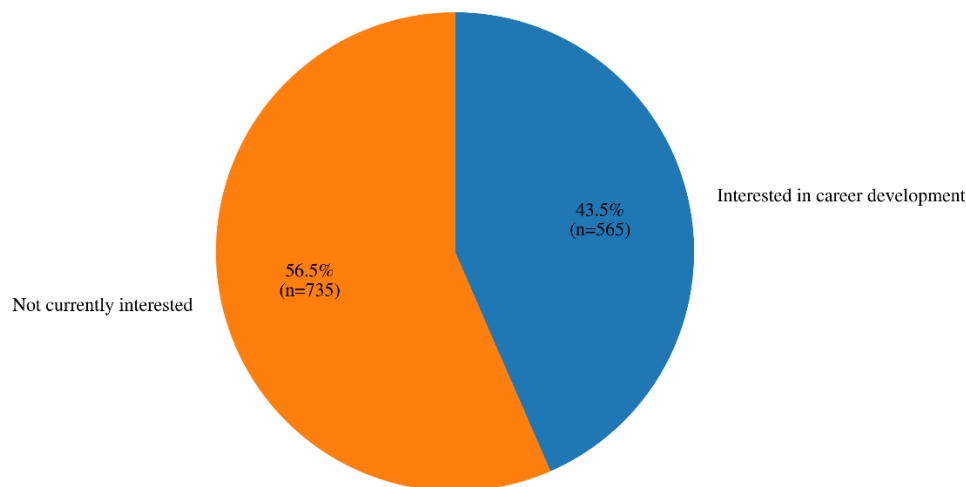


Figure 2. Female Employees' Interest in Career Development

The first important result is that career aspiration among female employees is not absent, but selective. The 43.5% of respondents who expressed interest in career development indicate that many female employees remain motivated to grow professionally, contribute more broadly, and pursue formal career pathways. However, the 56.5% who did not express current interest suggest that career advancement is not perceived as a neutral or purely individual decision. For many women, the decision to pursue career development appears to be filtered through considerations related to family responsibilities, placement risks, work-life balance, readiness, health, and the availability of organizational support.

The survey also indicates that the main reasons for limited interest in career advancement are not necessarily related to lack of competence or lack of commitment to the organization. Instead, several recurring considerations appear in the responses: family and childcare responsibilities, risk of placement far from homebase, approaching retirement age, perceived lack of readiness in competency or leadership, and concerns

related to work-life balance or mental health. These findings show that the meaning of career aspiration among female public sector employees is closely linked to the broader work ecosystem in which career decisions are made.

The open-ended responses further reveal the forms of organizational support expected by female employees. For the support-system item, 563 usable open-ended responses were coded thematically. The coding was non-exclusive, meaning that one response could contain more than one theme. Therefore, the percentages in Table 1 do not add up to 100%.

Table 1 shows that the most frequently identified theme is career and competency development, followed closely by placement and mobility policy, and childcare and family support. This pattern is important because it shows that female employees do not merely ask for general encouragement to pursue career advancement. They expect concrete organizational conditions that make career development more feasible. The high frequency of career development themes indicates that many respondents still value professional growth. At the same time, the similarly high frequency of placement, mobility, childcare, and family support themes suggests that career aspiration is closely tied to whether career advancement can be reconciled with family responsibilities and mobility requirements.

The findings also show that organizational support is expected at multiple levels. At the structural level, respondents emphasized career pathways, placement policy, flexible work arrangements, and facilities. At the relational level, they emphasized supervisor support, mentoring, role models, and supportive workplace culture. At the normative level, they emphasized fairness, transparency, anti-bias, and inclusion. This multi-level pattern suggests that female employees' career aspirations are shaped not only by formal career systems, but also by the broader organizational environment in which those systems are implemented.

Table 1. Expected Organizational Support for Female Employees' Career Development

No.	Thematic category	Count	% of usable responses	Main interpretation
1	Career and competency development	295	52.4%	Respondents expected clearer career pathways, competency development, training, certification, coaching, mentoring, and preparation for structural or functional career advancement.
2	Placement and mobility policy	284	50.4%	Respondents emphasized the importance of more predictable, transparent, and family-sensitive placement or mobility arrangements, especially in relation to homebase and family location.
3	Childcare and family support	278	49.4%	Respondents expected organizational support for childcare and family responsibilities, including daycare, lactation facilities, family-friendly workplace arrangements, and support for employees with young children.
4	Supervisor, mentoring, and supportive culture	232	41.2%	Respondents highlighted the need for supportive supervisors, mentoring, coaching, role models, inclusive culture, and empathetic workplace relationships.
5	Office facilities, housing, and safety	176	31.3%	Respondents expected facilities that support women's comfort, safety, parenting roles, and workplace productivity, including office facilities, housing-related support, and safe working environments.
6	Flexible work and leave arrangements	163	29.0%	Respondents expected flexible work arrangements, leave flexibility, and more adaptive working schedules, especially during periods of family or caregiving needs.
7	Fairness, transparency, and anti-bias	127	22.6%	Respondents emphasized transparent, merit-based, and gender-fair career systems, including equal opportunity and protection from bias or discriminatory assumptions.
8	Physical and mental wellbeing support	64	11.4%	Respondents expected support for physical and mental wellbeing, including counseling, stress management, health support, and psychological safety.

Source: Authors' analysis based on anonymized survey data from an Indonesian public sector organization.

Note. Non-exclusive thematic coding of 563 usable open-ended responses. A single response may contain more than one theme.

Taken together, the survey findings indicate that female employees' career aspirations are shaped by an interaction between individual motivation and organizational conditions. Career development is not rejected as a concept, but many respondents appear to evaluate whether career advancement is compatible with family responsibilities, mobility requirements, organizational fairness, supervisor support, and personal wellbeing. Thus, the central empirical finding of this study is that female employees' career aspiration in the Indonesian public sector is conditional, contextual, and ecosystem-dependent.

Discussion

Female Employees and the Public Sector Work Ecosystem

The survey findings suggest that career aspiration among female public sector employees is embedded in a work ecosystem rather than located solely in individual motivation. A work ecosystem includes formal career systems, leadership practices, mobility requirements, workplace culture, supervisor behavior, family support, facilities, and broader socio-cultural expectations. In the public sector, these elements are especially important because career pathways are usually governed by formal rules, hierarchical structures, standardized personnel systems, and placement or rotation mechanisms. However, the existence of formal rules does not automatically ensure equal career experience for all employees.

This finding is consistent with studies on women's leadership and career progression in the Indonesian civil service. McLaren et al. (2023) show that women's advancement in Indonesian public service leadership is shaped by a combination of institutional barriers, socio-cultural expectations, and gendered assumptions about leadership and family roles. McLaren et al. (2023) further demonstrate that Indonesian women's civil service leadership is influenced by family support, interpersonal relationships, education, aspirations, and organizational constraints. These studies support the interpretation that women's career progression in the public sector is not determined only by merit or individual ambition, but also by relational, structural, and cultural conditions.

The survey reinforces this argument by showing that many female employees evaluate career advancement through the lens of placement risk, family responsibilities, and organizational support. This is particularly relevant in geographically dispersed public sector organizations, where employees may be assigned across different regions and office contexts. In such organizations, career advancement may be associated with mobility, relocation, separation from family, or adaptation to unfamiliar workplace environments. Therefore, female employees may become hesitant not because they lack aspiration, but because the expected cost of advancement is perceived to be high.

The prominence of placement and mobility policy in Table 1 strengthens this point. Placement and mobility appeared in 284 usable responses, or 50.4% of the coded responses. This indicates that mobility is not a peripheral issue, but a central part of the career calculus for female employees. For organizations with vertical or geographically dispersed offices, mobility can be interpreted as both an opportunity and a risk. It may open access to career experience and leadership assignments, but it may also create family separation, childcare disruption, and psychological strain.

The public sector work ecosystem also affects access to career information and development opportunities. Studies on women's advancement in public administration emphasize the role of mentoring, networks, and access to strategic assignments in shaping career outcomes. Choi (2019) finds that social capital, mentoring, supervisor support, and important contacts matter for women's career success in public management. Studies on gendered organizational practices also suggest that women's career progression may be shaped by informal expectations, implicit norms, and unequal access to strategic developmental opportunities. These findings indicate that formal equality in career systems may be insufficient if informal access to support, networks, and development opportunities remains unequal.

The managerial implication is that public sector organizations should assess women's career development not only through promotion statistics, but also through the quality of the work ecosystem that enables or discourages aspiration. Human resource managers should identify whether female employees have equal access to mentoring, developmental assignments, leadership preparation, career information, and supervisor support. In geographically dispersed organizations, placement and rotation systems should also be made more transparent and predictable. When mobility is required, organizations should communicate the rationale, criteria, timing, and support mechanisms clearly so that career advancement does not appear as an uncontrollable risk.

Work-Life Balance and Career Continuity

The survey's 56.5% "not currently interested" group is best understood through the concept of career continuity, not career withdrawal. Career continuity refers to the ability of employees to remain professionally engaged and development-oriented across different life stages, including periods of caregiving, family transition, health pressure, or mobility constraint. From this perspective, female employees' lower current interest in career advancement does not necessarily indicate permanent disengagement. It may indicate that career aspiration is temporarily moderated by work-life balance considerations.

Work-family conflict theory provides a useful explanation. Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) argue that conflict between work and family roles may occur through time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict. These forms of conflict are highly relevant to women's career decisions, especially when career advancement requires longer working hours, greater availability, relocation, travel, or leadership responsibilities. Clark (2000) work/family border theory also suggests that individuals continuously negotiate boundaries between work and family domains. When the boundaries between work and family become difficult to manage, employees may adjust their career choices to reduce conflict and preserve stability.

The survey findings are consistent with this theoretical perspective. Respondents' concerns about childcare, family responsibilities, homebase, work-life balance, and mental health indicate that career decisions are made within the practical realities of daily life. Childcare and family support appeared in 278 usable responses, or 49.4% of the coded responses. This shows that family-related support is not merely a welfare preference, but a key condition for career sustainability. In this context, work-life balance is not a peripheral issue; it is part of the infrastructure that enables or constrains women's career continuity.

Recent literature supports this interpretation. Rashmi and Kataria (2022) show that work-life balance has become a diversified research field linked to employee wellbeing, satisfaction, and organizational outcomes. Ali et al. (2025) further find that work-life balance is closely related to women's career motivation, although the literature remains fragmented across different contexts. In public sector settings, Feeney and Stritch (2019) demonstrate that family-friendly policies, organizational culture, and gender matter for work-life balance. Ko (2024) also shows that family-friendly policies can improve employee wellbeing through work-life balance and organizational commitment.

The survey results also indicate that work-life balance should not be reduced to flexible working hours alone. While flexible work and leave arrangements appeared in 163 usable responses, or 29.0%, the broader work-life balance agenda is reflected across several themes, including childcare and family support, placement and mobility policy, facilities, wellbeing, and supportive supervisors. This suggests that work-life balance in public sector organizations should be treated as an integrated organizational design issue rather than an individual coping problem.

The managerial implication is that organizations should shift from a narrow promotion-centered view of women's career development to a continuity-centered approach. Such an approach would ask: what conditions allow female employees to remain professionally active, confident, and development-oriented across different life stages? Practical interventions may include childcare partnerships, daycare access, lactation and parenting facilities, predictable meeting schedules, temporary flexibility during intensive caregiving periods, re-entry support after maternity or caregiving leave, and family-sensitive consideration in placement decisions. These measures are not merely welfare benefits; they are career infrastructure that enables women to sustain aspiration over time.

Perceived Organizational Support and Career Aspiration

Perceived organizational support helps explain why some employees remain willing to pursue advancement while others become cautious. Perceived organizational support refers to employees' belief that the organization values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing Eisenberger et al. (1986). When employees perceive that the organization is fair, supportive, and responsive, they are more likely to invest effort, maintain commitment, and view future opportunities positively. Conversely, when employees perceive that advancement requires high personal cost without adequate support, they may become hesitant even if they have the capacity to advance.

This study's survey findings strongly align with organizational support theory. Respondents did not only ask for career opportunities; they also asked for mentoring, supervisor support, inclusive culture, transparent development systems, flexible work arrangements, and family-sensitive policies. These expectations indicate that career aspiration depends on whether employees believe the organization will support them through the risks and demands of career advancement. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) show that perceived organizational support is influenced by fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards or job conditions. Kurtessis et al. (2017) further confirm that perceived organizational support is associated with commitment, wellbeing, and performance. In this article's context, these findings suggest that perceived organizational support may also influence whether female employees consider career advancement feasible and worthwhile.

Supervisor support is particularly important. Jin and McDonald (2017), in their study of public sector employees, show that immediate supervisor support affects employee engagement both directly and indirectly through perceived organizational support. Hatmaker and Hassan (2023) also show that managerial support is relational and gendered, with women's experience of support affected by manager-employee relationship quality and gender congruence. These findings are relevant to the survey, where supervisor support, mentoring, and supportive culture appeared in 232 usable responses, or 41.2%. For female employees, support from direct supervisors may shape whether career development feels encouraged, accessible, and safe.

Mentoring is another important mechanism. McIlongo and Strydom (2021) find that mentorship supports women's career advancement in the public sector, especially when it helps women access guidance, confidence, networks, and career navigation strategies. Choi (2019) similarly emphasizes the importance of mentoring and social capital in women's career advancement. In the Indonesian civil service context, McLaren et al. (2023) highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships and support systems in women's career progression. These studies support the interpretation that women's career aspiration is not merely an internal psychological state, but also a product of relational access to encouragement, information, sponsorship, and developmental pathways.

The survey also shows that fairness, transparency, and anti-bias appeared in 127 usable responses, or 22.6%. Although this theme was not the most frequent, it is analytically important. Fairness and transparency shape whether employees perceive career systems as credible. If promotion, talent selection, mobility, and development opportunities are perceived as unclear or biased, employees may become less willing to invest in career advancement. Therefore, perceived organizational support is not only about emotional encouragement, but also about procedural fairness, transparency, and trust in the career system.

The managerial implication is that organizations should institutionalize support instead of relying on informal goodwill. Mentoring and sponsorship should be formalized, monitored, and connected to career development systems. Supervisors should be trained and evaluated on their ability to support inclusive career development. Selection and nomination criteria for talent programs, leadership training, promotion, and strategic assignments should be communicated transparently. Organizations should also track women's participation in training, talent pools, leadership preparation, and promotion processes. Without such systems, support may remain uneven and dependent on individual supervisors.

Toward a Gender-Responsive Work Ecosystem

The integrative finding of this study is that female employees' career aspiration in the Indonesian public sector is shaped by the interaction between work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and gendered organizational context. Existing studies often examine these domains separately: work-life balance studies focus on wellbeing, stress, engagement, or commitment; organizational support studies focus on engagement, exhaustion, retention, or performance; while women's career studies focus on ambition, promotion, leadership progression, and barriers to advancement. The survey findings suggest that female employees experience these issues together in a single career decision-making process.

A gender-responsive work ecosystem therefore requires more than equal formal rules. Equal access to promotion is important, but it does not fully address the conditions under which women decide whether to pursue advancement. If career progression is associated with unpredictable placement, limited childcare support, weak mentoring, unsupportive supervisors, inadequate facilities, and perceived bias, then formal equality may coexist with practical hesitation. This supports the argument that career aspiration should be understood as ecosystem-dependent rather than purely individual.

This integrative perspective is consistent with contemporary literature on women's careers in public organizations. Bishu et al. (2023), using the Kaleidoscope Career Model, show that women public managers' careers are shaped by balance, authenticity, and challenge, with balance remaining highly salient across generations. Kim et al. (2026) also show that women's career goals may shift after promotion or non-promotion, indicating that aspiration is dynamic and responsive to organizational experience. These findings support the argument that women's career aspiration should not be understood as fixed, but as responsive to organizational experiences, support systems, and perceived career risks.

For Indonesian public sector organizations, a gender-responsive work ecosystem should include at least five interrelated policy bundles. First, childcare and family support should be recognized as part of career sustainability infrastructure. Second, career development and competency-building pathways should be made transparent and accessible to female employees across career stages. Third, placement and mobility policies should be communicated clearly and, where possible, designed with family-sensitive considerations. Fourth, supervisor support, mentoring, and sponsorship should become institutional practices rather than informal arrangements. Fifth, flexible work arrangements, adequate facilities, lactation rooms, wellbeing support, and safe workplace culture should be treated as enabling conditions for sustained career participation.

The organization should also institutionalize gender-disaggregated talent metrics. These may include women's participation in competency development programs, leadership training, talent pools, promotion nominations, mobility assignments, and structural or functional career pathways. Such data can help organizations identify where female employees enter, remain, or exit the career pipeline. This is important because the survey suggests that many female employees may not reject career development itself, but may hesitate when the organizational ecosystem does not reduce the personal and family-related costs of advancement.

Overall, the findings indicate that the question is not simply how to increase women's interest in career advancement, but how to redesign the work ecosystem so that career advancement becomes more compatible with women's lived realities. A gender-responsive public sector organization should therefore move from a narrow view of career aspiration as individual ambition toward a broader view of career aspiration as a supported organizational outcome.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that female public sector employees' career aspirations should not be understood merely as an individual matter of ambition, motivation, or readiness. In the Indonesian public sector context, career aspiration is shaped by the interaction between work-life balance, perceived organizational support, and the broader work ecosystem in which career decisions are made. The evidence from the literature and exploratory survey data indicates that many female employees do not necessarily reject career development, but they evaluate career advancement through practical and relational considerations, including family responsibilities, childcare needs, placement and mobility risks, supervisor support, career development access, workplace facilities, and organizational fairness.

The main contribution of this study is the argument that women's career aspiration is conditional, contextual, and ecosystem-dependent. A formal career system that appears equal on paper may not be experienced equally when advancement requires high mobility, continuous availability, limited family support, or uncertain placement. Therefore, efforts to strengthen women's career participation in public organizations should move beyond motivational programs or general encouragement. Public sector organizations need to build enabling conditions that make career development more compatible with women's professional and personal realities.

The practical implication is that human resource management in public sector organizations should adopt a more gender-responsive approach to career development. This includes providing clearer competency development pathways, strengthening mentoring and sponsorship systems, improving supervisor support, ensuring transparent and merit-based career processes, and designing more family-sensitive placement and mobility policies. Support for childcare, lactation facilities, flexible work arrangements, wellbeing services, and safe workplace facilities should also be treated as part of career infrastructure, not merely as employee welfare programs.

For policy and managerial practice, the findings suggest that organizations should institutionalize gender-disaggregated monitoring across talent management, training participation, promotion nominations, mobility assignments, and leadership pipelines. Such monitoring would allow organizations to identify where female employees face barriers, hesitate to enter the career pipeline, or require additional support. In geographically dispersed public sector organizations, placement policy deserves particular attention because mobility can function both as a career opportunity and as a source of career hesitation.

Future research should examine these relationships using broader samples, comparative organizational settings, and more robust quantitative or mixed-method designs. Further studies may also explore how marital status, childcare responsibilities, career stage, job type, work location, and supervisor support influence women's willingness to pursue career advancement. Despite its exploratory nature, this study provides a basis for understanding women's career aspirations not as a fixed personal preference, but as an organizationally shaped outcome that can be strengthened through a more supportive and gender-responsive public sector work ecosystem.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

a. Journal Articles

- Ali, R., Sujood, Naz, A., & Azhar, M. (2025). Work-life balance, career motivation and women: a systematic literature review and research agenda in the Indian context. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 40(3), 467–504. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2024-0022>
- Bao, Y., & Zhong, W. (2019). How Stress Hinders Health among Chinese Public Sector Employees: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion and the Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(22), 4408. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16224408>
- Bishu, S. G., Sabharwal, M., & Reyes, R. (2023). Careers of women public managers: Career needs of women public managers across generations. *Public Administration Review*, 83(1), 163–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13548>
- Choi, S. (2019). Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Social Capital Matters for Women's Career Success? *International Public Management Journal*, 22(2), 295–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2018.1425225>
- Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/Family Border Theory: A New Theory of Work/Family Balance. *Human Relations*, 53(6), 747–770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700536001>
- D'Agostino, M., Levine, H., Sabharwal, M., & Johnson-Manning, A. C. (2022). Organizational Practices and Second-Generation Gender Bias: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Career Progression of U.S. State-Level Managers. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 52(5), 335–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02750740221086605>
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 500–507. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.500>
- Feeney, M. K., & Stritch, J. M. (2019). Family-Friendly Policies, Gender, and Work-Life Balance in the Public Sector. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 39(3), 422–448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X17733789>
- Finkel, M. K., Grøn, C. H., & Hughes, M. M. (2023). Moving On Up? Effects of Leadership Training and Intersectoral Mobility on Women's Advancement in Danish Public Administration Management. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 43(2), 215–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X211054875>
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of Conflict Between Work and Family Roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1985.4277352>
- Hatmaker, D. M., & Hassan, S. (2023). When do women receive managerial support? The effects of gender congruence and the manager-employee relationship. *Public Management Review*, 25(1), 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1937683>
- Jin, M. H., & McDonald, B. (2017). Understanding Employee Engagement in the Public Sector: The Role of Immediate Supervisor, Perceived Organizational Support, and Learning Opportunities. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 47(8), 881–897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016643817>
- Kim, S., Jang, M., & Kim, B. J. (2026). When Promotions Come Unexpectedly: Promotion Congruence and Women's Career Goal Transitions in Public Administration. *Public Personnel Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00910260261421587>
- Ko, M. C. (2024). The Structural Relationship of Family-Friendly Policies, Work-Life Balance, and Employee' Subjective Wellbeing: Focusing on the Categorization of Family-Friendly Policies Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 44(2), 377–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X221136431>
- Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A., & Adis, C. S. (2017). Perceived Organizational Support: A Meta-Analytic Evaluation of Organizational Support Theory. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1854–1884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315575554>
- Maranto, R., Teodoro, M. P., Carroll, K., & Cheng, A. (2019). Gendered Ambition: Men's and Women's Career Advancement in Public Administration. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 49(4), 469–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074018804564>

- McIlongo, M., & Strydom, K. (2021). The significance of mentorship in supporting the career advancement of women in the public sector. *Heliyon*, 7(6), e07321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07321>
- McLaren, H., Patmisari, E., Hamiduzzaman, M., Star, C., & Widianingsih, I. (2023). Indonesian Women's Civil Service Leadership: Analysis of Career Progression Opportunity and Constraint. *Administration & Society*, 55(6), 1218–1249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997231167556>
- Palumbo, R. (2024). Making Sense of the Relationship between Involvement and Work–Life Balance: Empirical Insights from the Public Sector. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 47(10), 663–679. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2023.2166065>
- Rashmi, K., & Kataria, A. (2022). Work–life balance: a systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 42(11/12), 1028–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-06-2021-0145>
- Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), 698–714. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.698>
- Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1400. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400>
- Yang, Y., & Islam, D. M. T. (2021). Work-life Balance and Organizational Commitment: a Study of Field Level Administration in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(14), 1286–1296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2020.1755684>

b. Reference Source from Website

- McKinsey. (2026). Women in the Workplace. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/women-in-the-workplace>
- Datta, N., & Kotikula, A. (2016). Fostering Quality of Employment for Women. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/6db3afb6-02f6-50fb-b691-033b3f3cd2ca/content>