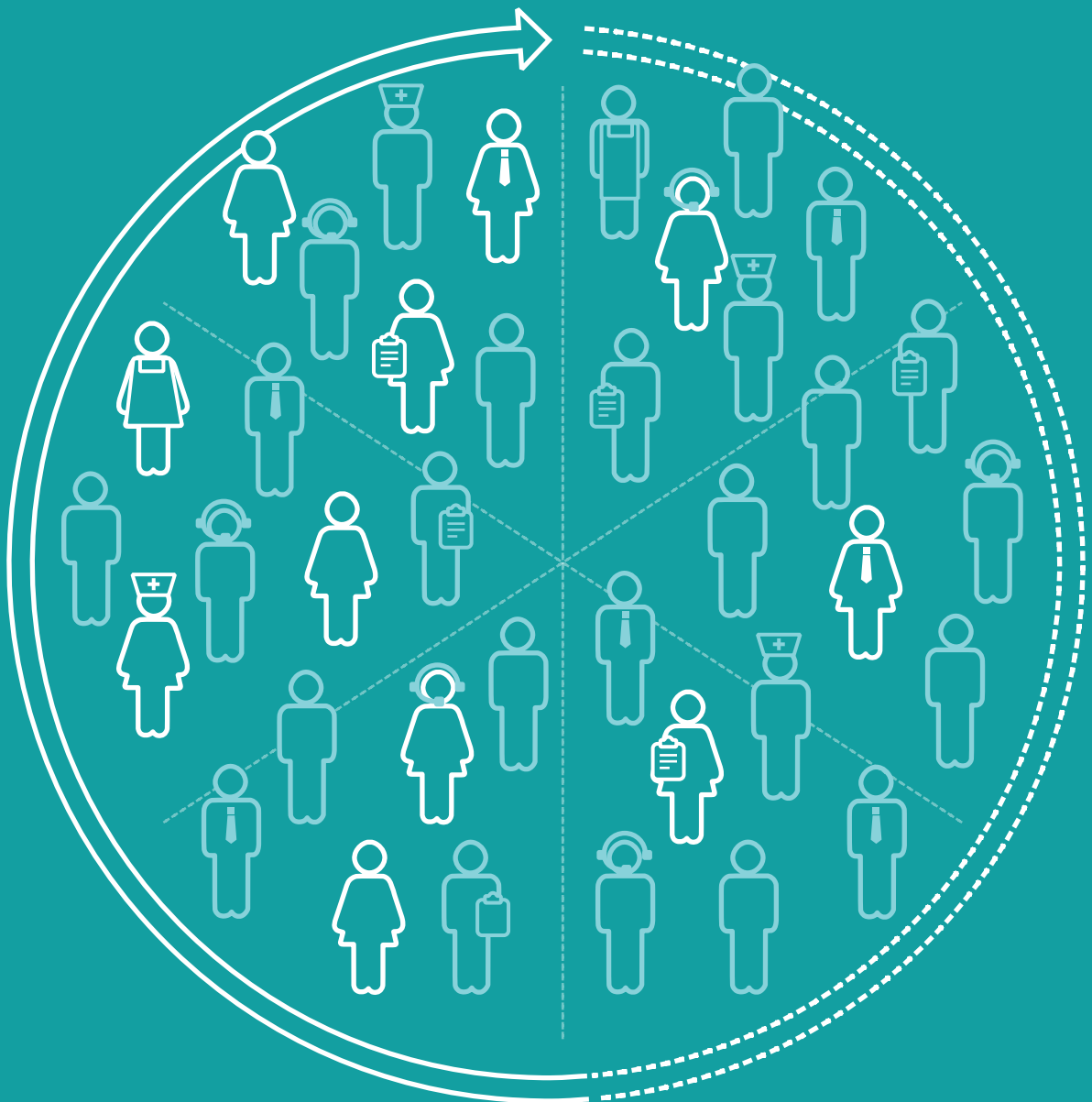


# *From Rhetoric to Action- Creating Gender Inclusive Workplaces*

Lessons and Insights from  
Gender Transformation Journey of Qness



# About

## *The Udaiti Foundation*

The Udaiti Foundation (TUF) is building data-backed evidence to accelerate Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in India. Udaiti focuses on improving the availability and accessibility of quality work for women, addressing barriers to women's work and entrepreneurship, and strengthening enablers that can create impact. We aim for every Indian woman to achieve her full economic potential as it will be a critical lever to help India become a \$10 trillion economy in the next decade.

## *Quess Corp Limited*

Quess Corp Limited (Quess) is India's leading business services provider, leveraging its extensive domain knowledge and future-ready digital platforms to drive client productivity through outsourced solutions. It provides a host of technology enabled staffing and managed outsourcing services across processes such as sales and marketing, customer care, after sales service, back office operations, manufacturing operations. In addition, it extends its services to facilities, security management, human resource, finance, administration operations, IT and mobility services.

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# Definitions

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## **a. Associates:**

Qess associates are contract workers employed by Qess Corp Limited and deployed at various client locations to perform general staffing or flexible workforce roles. These associates fall under the company's General Staffing vertical.

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## **b. Tenure:**

Tenure refers to the period of time that an employee has spent working for a particular company or in a specific job role.

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## **c. Turnover Rate:**

Turnover rate refers to the rate or percentage at which employees leave a company or organisation over a specific period of time

$$\text{Turnover Rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{Number of employees who left}}{\text{Total number of employees}} \times 100$$

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# Executive Summary

The Indian staffing industry has undergone a transformative journey over the past decade, fuelled by rapid technological advancements and shifting workforce dynamics. Quess Corp Limited, a leading company in this domain, plays a critical role in facilitating seamless employment arrangements and talent acquisition processes across various sectors. This report delves into the representation, retention, and turnover dynamics among Quess associates, focusing on the gender disparities and the company's initiatives aimed at improving women's representation.

Quess Corp employs contract workers, referred to as 'associates', who are deployed at various client locations to perform general staffing or flexible workforce roles. These associates fall under the company's General Staffing vertical. Throughout this report, we use the term "associates" to refer to these contract workers.

Quess Corp has made strides in increasing its female workforce, but women currently make up only 17% of associates (in general staffing business), which aligns with the broader staffing industry. As per the Indian Staffing Federation Social Impact Report 2023, women represent 25% of the staffing industry. However, it is important to note that the staffing industry data includes IT employees where women constitute nearly half of the workforce, whereas the Quess payroll analysis does not include the IT staffing data. In fact, the IT vertical within Quess has 55% women employees. Additionally, Quess data is sourced from actual payroll records, while ISF data is a compilation based on responses from members.

During the **initial three months of employment, a substantial proportion of new associates, regardless of gender, leave the organisation**, with the proportion of female dropouts slightly outpacing their male counterparts. This early attrition phase presents a critical juncture, where targeted interventions could potentially stem the outflow of talent. **Across various sectors, female associates consistently face higher turnover rates compared to their male counterparts**, with the exception of the IT and Services industries.

Several factors influence associate retention dynamics. Age plays a role, with associates aged 40 and above exhibiting a higher likelihood of retaining their jobs compared to their

younger counterparts. For female associates, marital status does not affect retention, suggesting the work-related challenges they face remain consistent before and after marriage. Higher-paying jobs, with a monthly salary exceeding INR 15,000, are associated with significantly better likelihood of retention for both genders. Additionally, **access to benefits such as provident funds, ESIC, and performance incentives positively impacts retention, particularly for married women.**

**Better career opportunities emerge as a dominant driver for departures across genders**, accounting for 43% of exits among associates, but there are also distinct gender-specific patterns. While work-related challenges, such as manager behaviour and work culture, impact both genders similarly, **women disproportionately cite family responsibilities and health issues, including pregnancy-related complications, as reasons for leaving their jobs.**

Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by women in the workforce, Quess Corp has implemented various initiatives to foster an inclusive and supportive environment. The SARA chatbot, a WhatsApp-based platform, interacts with new hires during the critical first 90 days, providing insights into their experiences and enabling the identification of potential flight risks. Female Liaison Officers employed by Quess are strategically deployed at manufacturing units to oversee the welfare of female associates, address grievances, and promptly resolve concerns. The Sampoorana Rozgar Yojana, a new initiative by Quess provides accommodation facilities and basic amenities, supporting migratory women in adapting to new workplaces. Additionally, the [DASH](#) platform developed by Quess caters to the financial needs of associates by offering loans and salary advances.

This report underscores the persisting challenges faced by women in the workforce and emphasises the need for comprehensive strategies to promote gender diversity and inclusivity. Quess Corp's multifaceted initiatives demonstrate a commitment to addressing these challenges and creating a supportive environment conducive to women's economic empowerment.

# Introduction

## About the Industry

In the current business environment, the effective management of the workforce emerges as an important element for organisations to thrive. This is evident as businesses navigate through fluctuating demands, evolving technologies, and dynamic market trends. In India, with its vast and diverse workforce, the role of staffing companies becomes important in facilitating seamless employment arrangements and talent acquisition processes.

Over the past decade, the Indian staffing industry has undergone significant growth, fuelled by various factors including technological advancements and shifting workforce preferences. The general staffing industry provides manpower services by helping to match qualified candidates with companies that have job openings across sectors like e-commerce, retail, telecom, manufacturing etc. They provide services across blue-collar, grey-collar and entry-level white-collar jobs. India has emerged as one of the largest countries for flexi staffing in the world with a market size of \$12 billion. As per Goldman Sachs<sup>1</sup>, temporary staffing could account for 10% of India's formal employment by 2025. The industry is expected to grow 2x by FY26 and 5x in the coming decade to \$60 billion. According to the Indian Staffing Federation (ISF) 2023 annual report<sup>2</sup>, about 100 members of the ISF employ 1.3 million flexi workforce. The staffing industry saw 14% year-on-year growth in FY23 compared to 22% in FY22. The industry (ISF members) added approximately 0.18 million flexi-jobs to India's formal employment sector in FY23. As the economy evolves, the organised staffing market in India is expected to grow at a higher speed and benefit larger compliance adherent players.

## Women in the Industry

The workforce management industry has witnessed transformation in the roles and representation of women, reflecting the broader societal shifts towards greater gender parity. From traditional administrative and support functions, women's involvement has expanded to leadership roles, specialised domains, and strategic initiatives, showcasing their contributions to the sector.

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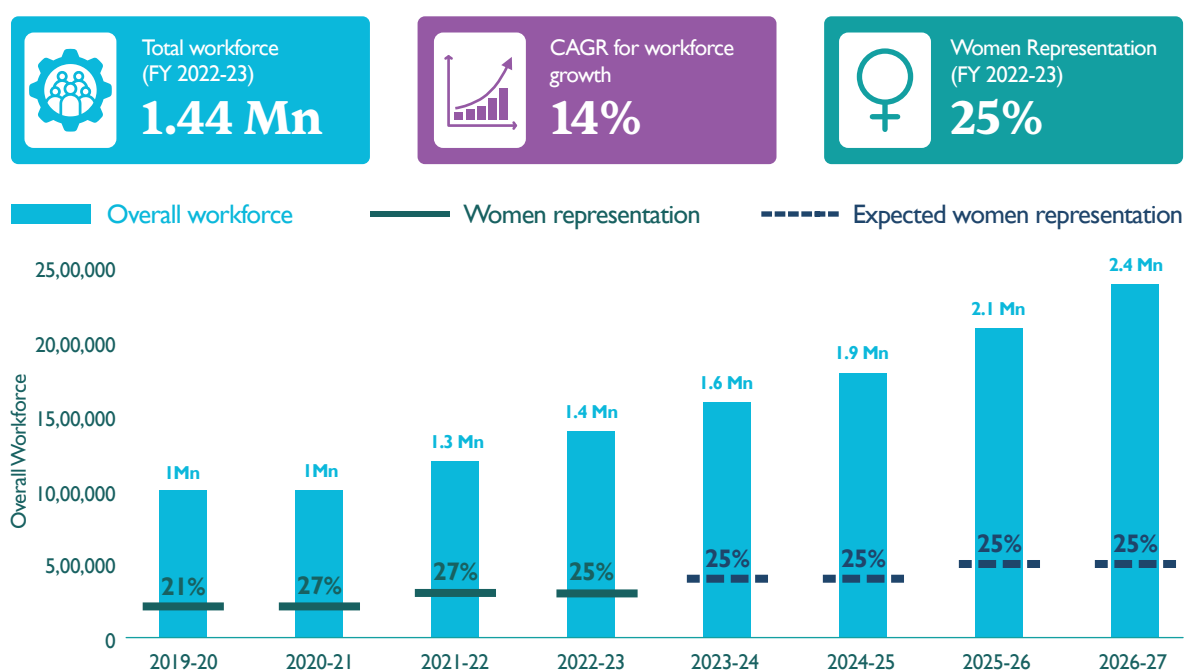
1 Goldman Sachs - Equity Research, 2021, India Business Services: Staffing

2 Indian Staffing Federation, 2023, Annual Report: Flexi Staffing Industry



The Flexi Employment Social Impact Report 2023<sup>3</sup> by the Indian Staffing Federation indicates that the representation of women in the flexi workforce has increased over the years. In 2020, women made up 21% of the flexi workforce. This number grew to 27% in 2021 and 2022. After a slight 2% drop post-COVID, women currently comprise 25% of the flexi workforce<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure A:** Women's representation in the General Staffing Industry over the years based on the data obtained from Indian Staffing Federation Annual Report, 2023<sup>5</sup>. The expected women representation for 2023-24 to 2026-27 is based on the assumption that the current women's representation of 25% will be maintained.



The staffing industry struggles with high attrition rates - a significant challenge to organisational stability and growth. This issue stems from factors such as the temporary nature of employment, lack of job security, and limited avenues for professional development. For female associates, these challenges are exacerbated by workplace discrimination, care responsibilities and social norms. Given that a majority of the staffing personnel are below the 30 age group, they use flexi jobs as a pathway to fully transition into formal employment.

Recognizing and addressing the underlying causes of high turnover is crucial for a sustainable and inclusive work environment. Prioritising initiatives aimed at enhancing the

<sup>3</sup> Indian Staffing Federation, 2023, Flexi Employment Social Impact Report

<sup>4</sup> Note that ISF data includes IT employees, where women constitute nearly half of the workforce, and is a compilation based on responses from member organisations.

<sup>5</sup> Indian Staffing Federation, 2023, Flexi Employment Social Impact Report

hiring rate and retention of women within the workforce management sector is important. This will require a multifaceted approach to tackle the systemic barriers that women face in the industry.

## About Qess Corp

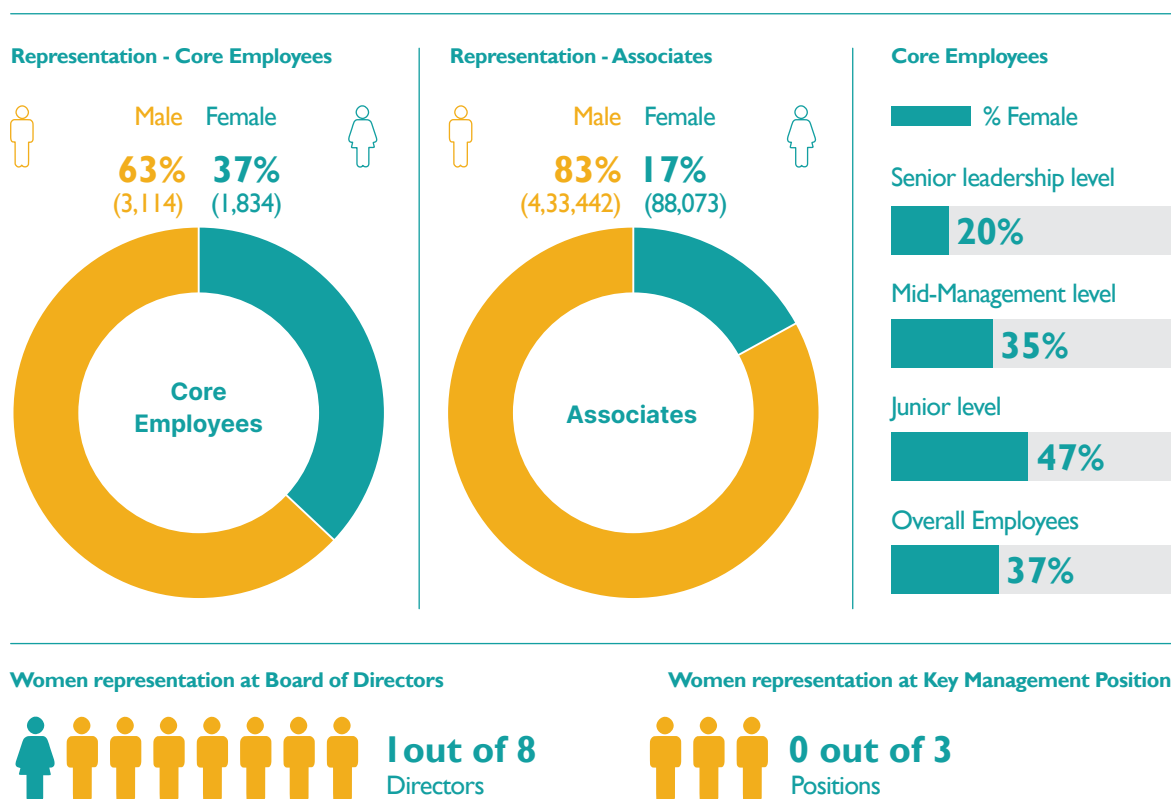
Qess Corp Limited, a business services provider, offers outsourced solutions that are intended to improve productivity for its clients. With a workforce of over 500,000 associates, Qess accounts for approximately 35% of India's total staffing employment.

The company adopts a strategic approach to improve workforce productivity, featuring initiatives such as vocational training and skill development to enhance employability. It facilitates seamless job matching for job seekers, streamlines workflows through digitization, and extends social security benefits to a broader employable segment of the population.

## Women in Qess

Qess has two categories of employees: the core employees and the associates. Core employees are employed within Qess' core business (white-collar jobs), while associates are employees on Qess payroll but are deployed to work for clients of Qess.

**Figure B** Women representation at Qess



This report examines data from both permanent employees, where the proportion of female hires is greater, and temporary staff, where the number of women employed is comparatively lower.

According to Qess Corp FY 2022-23 Annual Report<sup>6</sup>, the company has set a target to increase the representation of women in its core workforce from 28% to 50% by 2025. The organisation has made rapid progress in this direction by having 37% of the total 4,948 core employees as women as of March 2024. As for the associates in General Staffing, Qess hopes to increase the women workforce from the existing 17% to at least 25% in the next couple of years and this requires efforts from both the Qess and its clients who place the hiring mandate.

## DEI Initiatives at Qess

### DEI initiatives aimed at core women employees

#### HIRING

##### RETURN TO WORK POLICY



Qess has a return to work policy for women which has features such as work from home, flexible hours. This policy has been initiated to actively seek women returning to work from career breaks, through their hiring policy.

##### GENDER-INCLUSIVE HIRING



Ensuring a gender-inclusive hiring process by having a balanced panel during recruitment, with at least one female officer or recruiter available to support all candidates. Additionally, ensuring gender neutral job descriptions and advertisements to enable more women to apply to the vacant positions.

##### "PINK HUB" OFFICE



Establishing a "Pink Hub" Qess office in Jaipur, Rajasthan, which currently consists of 50% women, with a target of 70% women employees. In case of any attrition of women employees across any office in Qess in India, the replacement is hired from the "Pink Hub" office.

<sup>6</sup> Qess Corp Limited, Annual Report 2022-23

## RETENTION

### WORK FROM HOME POLICY



Policy called “Sthree”, a rest and work from home opportunity for women during their menstrual cycles.

### HEALTH AWARENESS SESSIONS



Health awareness sessions, along with a range of other virtual wellness sessions are held for women employees with focus on topics like “Handling Children and Child Behaviour during the Pandemic ” and Quess’s return to work policy, targeting expecting and new mothers.

### BUDDY ASSIGNMENTS



When women employees are away on their maternity leave, a buddy is assigned to them, who gives her updates related to organisational changes, project updates, policy deadlines and other relevant matters, so that they do not feel isolated from the organisation while being away.

### “OWN YOUR VEHICLE” INITIATIVE



“Own Your Vehicle” is a women-centric initiative under QWEEN that enables women employees to buy a car/ two-wheeler without a down payment, at subsidised interest rates, and less than 50% processing fees. The initiative empowers women to make their dream of mobility possible.

## ADVANCEMENT

### “GROW” PROGRAMME



The “Getting Ready for Opportunities at Work ” (GROW) is a digital app-based learning programme which is aimed at helping women employees at career levels 3 and 4 (mid-management roles) cultivate managerial and leadership skills, improve business acumen, foster strong professional networks and integrate wellness and work-life balance in their routine.

### “WONDERWOMAN” SPEAKER SERIES



“WonderWoman” speaker series is an initiative by Quess to inspire women employees, which features powerful women from different fields who share their experiences and insights. This provides effective and inspiring role models to the women employees.

**JOMBAY 1,000  
WOMEN LEADERS  
PROGRAMME**

Jombay 1,000 Women Leaders Programme is a 4.5 month long rigorous training programme that allows to select women leaders in Qness to improve their career and competence. It comprises assessments, mentoring by external leaders, and masterclasses from subject matter experts.

**THE “QWEEN”  
INITIATIVE**

The “Qween” initiative at Qness is a targeted mentoring programme, which includes

- a. Regional networking groups and events, where women employees find a platform to connect with other women
- b. Women employees at Qness get guidance on a broad spectrum of aspects through the help desk for free expert consultation
- c. Women leaders at Qness share their experiences and perspectives in empowering and inspiring sessions held by Qness
- d. The “Qween” newsletter, See Her Empowered (S.H.E) aims to be a medium through which diversity and inclusion related news, events and articles can be shared with all employees at Qness.

### DEI initiatives aimed at women associates

**FEMALE LIAISON  
OFFICERS**

At each manufacturing unit, Female Liaison Officers are stationed to oversee the welfare of associates.

**SAMPOORNA  
ROZGAR YOJANA**

The Sampoorna Rozgar Yojana is a new initiative providing infrastructure, food facilities and essential living amenities to support migratory women in adapting to new cities, while also offering dormitory accommodations.

**HIRING CHANNELS**

Qness has established various channels like Job Melas, Job Portals, Job Posts and newspaper advertisements, along with leveraging its talent database, to facilitate hiring across all regions and levels. The company also partners with Governments, NGOs, and State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLMs) to enhance diversity in hiring and broaden its reach to communities at district and block levels.

**FOCUSED FEMALE  
HIRING**



If partner organisations request focused female hiring, sourcing managers and recruiters from Quess ensure that those requirements are met. Additionally, in order to make hiring more inclusive, Quess organises massive drives to hire women and create a talent pool of women in unconventional, male-dominated roles.

**Integrating DEI in the workplace culture**

**REINFORCEMENT  
OF DEI BEST  
PRACTICES**



In order to recognise and reinforce the best practices in DEI, Quess celebrates inclusion days and regularly publishes DEI data and initiatives. Additionally, they acknowledge and reward individuals and leaders who have committed themselves to DEI and worked towards creating a diverse, inclusive and equitable culture.

**EDUCATION AND  
AWARENESS**



Raising awareness regarding DEI and its value, and educating everyone in the organisation around it.

**TAILORING OF  
DEI PRACTICES**



Listening to people's experiences, perceptions and feedback to tailor DEI practices in the best possible way for the organisation.

**CREATING  
A CULTURE OF  
INCLUSIVITY**



Involving everyone in the organisation while creating a culture of inclusivity. This involves sponsorship and drive from leaders in the organisation too.

**ZERO TOLERANCE**



Building a culture conducive to equity and inclusion of all, and having zero tolerance towards discriminatory practices.

**INCLUSIVE  
RECRUITMENT**



HR managers ensure an inclusive recruitment process by leveraging effective communication channels, overcoming unconscious bias, promoting inclusive leadership, and embracing cultural diversity to thrive on strengths of diverse members.

# Methodology

The primary objective of this initiative was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing employee retention and turnover dynamics among Quess associates. Over the last four years, we analysed the turnover rates among male and female associates, identifying trends across various parameters such as sectors, regions, job roles, and age groups. The factors influencing retention for both genders were investigated, understanding the distinct challenges and motivations that impact male and female associates. Additionally, we explored initiatives implemented by Quess Corp to improve retention rates and examined the company's sourcing and hiring strategies to increase female representation in the General Staffing vertical.

## *Data Sources and Key Variables*

The study utilised the following datasets

**1. Payroll data:** This dataset included payroll information for Quess Corp employees and associates from January 2020 to December 2023. Key variables extracted from this dataset included demographics (gender, age, location), job details (sector, role, last working day, tenure) and monthly salary.

**2. SARA Chatbot data:** The SARA chatbot dataset from May 2023 to December 2023 captured the reasons of exits across various employee segments, including sector and job roles.

**3. DASH data:** This dataset contained information on salary advances and loans taken by female associates through the DASH program over the period of January 2023 to December 2023.

In addition to these datasets, the study incorporated in-depth Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with representatives from various departments within Quess Corporation, including the Human Resource, General Staffing vertical, Sourcing, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) teams. These interviews gathered insights into the company's initiatives, challenges and strategies related to associate retention and promoting gender diversity.

## *Analysis*

The analysis involved statistical examination of the payroll, SARA chatbot, and DASH datasets to identify trends, patterns, and correlations related to turnover rates, reasons for exit and gender dynamics. Statistical techniques such as trend analysis, logistic regression analysis, and correlation analysis were employed to uncover relationships between variables and to assess the impact of various factors on retention rates.

The KIs complemented the analysis, offering a holistic understanding of the factors influencing associate retention and initiatives taken by Quess Corp to improve gender diversity from various stakeholder perspectives.



*Literature Review:*

# *Challenges and Strategies to Hire and Retain Women in the Workforce*



Despite India's remarkable economic progress and attempts to foster gender equality in the workforce, women in the country continue to face significant barriers and systemic challenges in their professional journey. The insertion of gender and inclusive workplace in the Sustainable Development Goals is another evidence signalling towards the same.

### *Challenges in Hiring and Retention of Women*

Commencing with the hiring process, a lack of diversity and inclusivity in recruitment practices obstructs equal employment opportunities. Once entered in the workforce, wage disparities and inequitable compensation contrary to male counterparts emerge as another hindrance. Implicit biases during performance evaluations, promotions again cater to an uneven playing field. Furthermore, the obstacles persist even after women return from parental leave due to lack of a supportive environment. The dearth of part time employment and flexible working hours further limit the growth of working mothers. The above mentioned multifaceted barriers not only limit women's career growth but also divest organisations of a diverse and skilled talent pool, thereby impeding their long-term competitiveness and expansion.

The literature highlights that there are initiatives considered across different sectors which aided in hiring and retention of women in the workforce. It is crucial to focus on both the aspects as hiring includes huge recruitment costs to the organisation.<sup>7</sup> Deploying few practices may enable organisations to curb additional costs by retaining the workforce.

### *Strategies for Retaining Women in the Workforce*

A comprehensive 360-degree approach should be adopted which may include investment in expansion of skills and career, amplifying women's voices, providing a positive work environment, benefits and compensations. Supportive work environments catering to sabbatical leave, onsite childcare and continuous organisational engagement aids in retaining women.<sup>8</sup> Training, mentorship, networking, catering to the unique needs of individuals like gender responsive leadership programs, career coaching workshops along with flexible working hours and career growth through pathways for higher levels encourage women employees to remain for a longer duration in jobs.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, employee engagement

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<sup>7</sup> TeamLease, Employee Retention Strategies in Consumer Healthcare Sector

<sup>8</sup> International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering, 2019, Retention of Women Employees in an Organization

<sup>9</sup> Talent Tech Labs, 2023, Celebrating Women's History Month: Uplifting and Retaining Women in your Workforce

could be ensured through on the job training, leadership and career development sessions and regular feedback.<sup>10</sup>

## *Strategies for Hiring Women in the Workforce*

There are a few hiring initiatives adopted by different organisations to increase women employees and meet gender diversity goals. The evidence shows that gender balanced hiring committees provide equal and bias-free opportunities to female candidates. A McKinsey report showed that Citi deployed a mixed gender and diverse interview panel approach in hiring of women at top management levels and surpassed its own set targets of 40% (achieving 40.6%).<sup>11</sup> Gender neutral job descriptions is another approach adopted by organisations to attract more women candidates. A study by Centre for Economic Data & Analysis (CEDA) shows that strong wordings, associating gender with low and high skill jobs and even with wages impact the type of talent pool applying.<sup>12</sup> Even if gender targeting role practices are banned, the conventional mindset and stereotype are first to tackle within the organisations. Implementing strategy and tools to recruit diversified workforce through job descriptions containing clear information in the requirements, dedicated hiring set up for women in tier I and tier II cities, marketing campaigns dedicated for women returning to work are a few other initiatives aided in women hirings.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> McKinsey & Company, 2022, Women in the Workplace

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Economic and Data Analysis, 2021, Does the wording in a job ad matter for the gender mix of job applicants?

## *Insight 1*

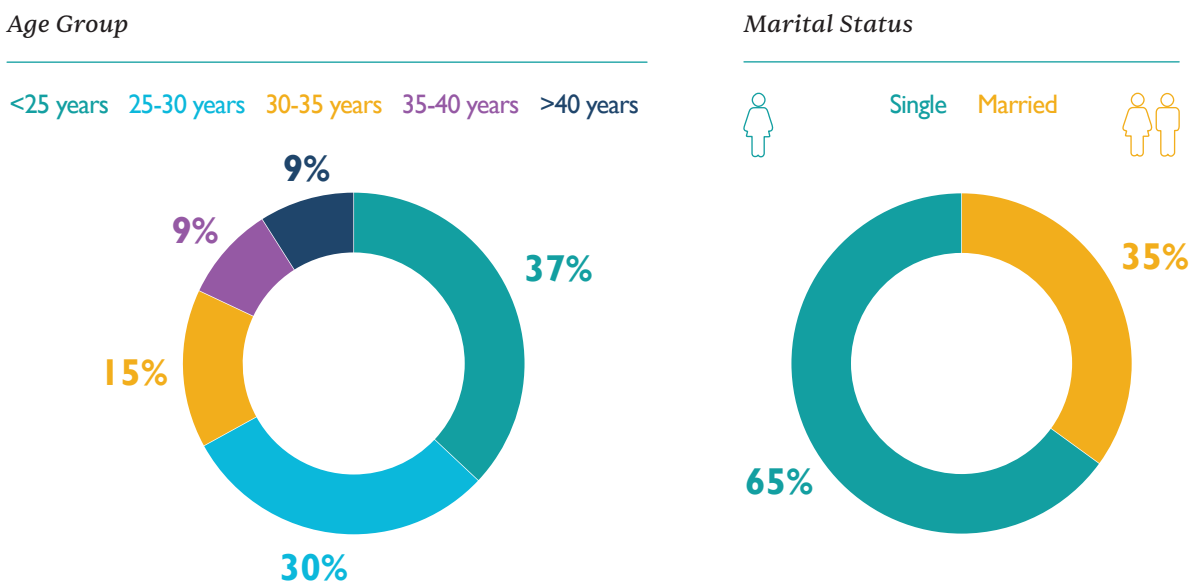
# *Women Representation at the Associate Level*

*Quess aims to increase 17% women's associate-level representation through targeted sourcing strategies and gender-inclusive hiring process.*



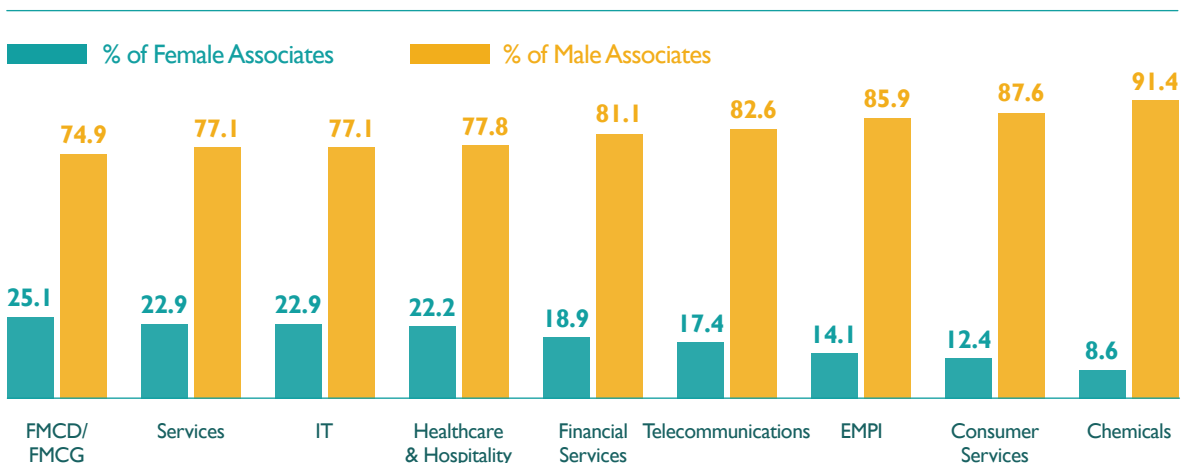
The associates form 99% of Qess workforce and increasing the number of women in the associates' level will have a major impact in the representation in the overall Staffing Services Industry. Qess Corp's DEI initiatives extend beyond the core staff to the associates and are committed to improve women representation across sectors. The current representation of women in the associate level is 17% and has been fairly stagnant over the last four years. The majority of women employed are younger with 65% of them single and 37% of them less than 25 years of age.

**Figure 1.1** The distribution of associates across age group and marital status



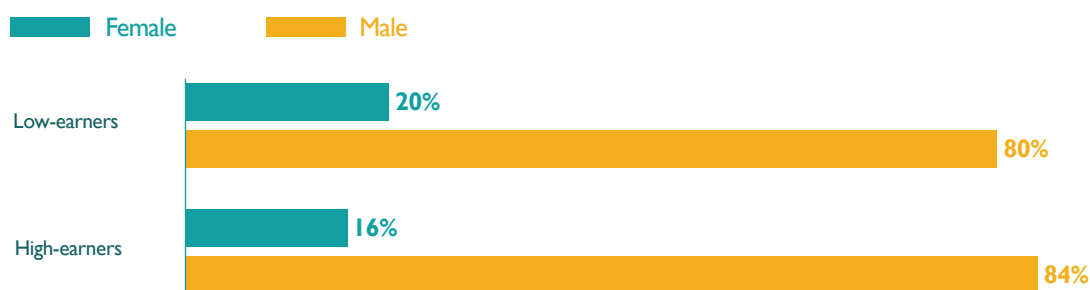
Similar to the trends observed in the broader formal sector, there is higher representation of women across the industries in the Services sector compared to Manufacturing (EMPI) and Telecommunications sector. The Chemicals, Manufacturing and Services sectors saw the highest increase in women representation in the last four years.

**Figure 1.2** Representation of male and female associates within each sector



Higher representation of women was observed in the Low-earners category (< INR 15,000 monthly CTC) compared to associates in the High-earners category ( $\geq$  INR 15,000 monthly CTC). This indicates there are more women in the entry level (Executive/Operator/Housekeeping etc.) and as the level increases (Senior Executive/Supervisor/Manager), the representation of women decreases. The top three major states in terms of women representation are Tamil Nadu (27%), Karnataka (26%) and Telangana (24%). It should be noted that the majority of the jobs in Qess pay the minimum wage stipulated by respective states, while associates do get a higher salary based on their work experience, job roles, etc. Some of the roles, like field sales, offer incentives as well.

**Figure 1.3** Representation of male and female associates among low-earners and high-earners, where, INR 15,000 is the median CTC in the payroll data.



## Quess Initiatives to Hire More Women



**1. Quess sourcing strategy:** Multiple channels are developed to ensure hiring across all the regions and at various levels. Initiatives like Job Melas, Job Portals, Social Media and Newspaper advertisements along with a strong database maintained by Quess are considered to ensure a readily available pool of talent. To confirm diversity in hiring, partnerships with governments such as the National Apprenticeship Training Scheme, and NGOs have been established. State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLMs) aid in reaching out to the population at district and block levels.

If a client places a demand to hire women in large numbers especially in manufacturing and FMCG sectors, Quess organises bulk hiring events targeted at women. To communicate the job fair to the community, the company uses a multi-faceted approach. This includes reaching out to local leaders such as sarpanches and block officers, elected representatives, heads of educational institutions, distributing pamphlets and using announcements. Additionally, recruiters visit parents and family members of female candidates and convince them about the job role, safety aspects etc and persuade them to send their wards to faraway places for work.



**2. Gender-inclusive hiring process:** A gender neutral panel is ensured during the hiring process with the presence of one female officer or recruiter to assist all the associates. Contingent upon the request by partner organisations/ client for dedicated female hiring, the Quess team also makes use of the applicants database to find suitable candidates for job roles in specific locations.



**3. Ensuring they join the workforce:** Quess provides them initial travel tickets (bus/ train based on the distance) not just to the associates but also for her family members so that they can ensure the safety of the workplace and accommodation. Recruiters also help candidates in finding external accommodation facilities such as hostels and paying guests close to their workplace, which help candidates to build trust in the employer.

## CASE STUDY

# Hiring Migrants for a Prominent Electronic Manufacturer

### *Key strategies adopted by Quess for sourcing and hiring women across states*

**Introduction:** Quess has been a strategic partner of a leading electronic manufacturer for the last 1.5 years, providing comprehensive outsourcing services for recruitment and onboarding of associates. The prominent partner in the manufacturing industry specialises in electronic components and devices. Quess sources associates from regions such as Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh to fulfil the requirements of the client's factory in Hosur, Tamil Nadu. With a special focus on hiring women associates for its factory, Quess has consistently provided a 100% female workforce. Currently, 10,000 associates work in the factory comprising majority of women out of which 1,600 female associates are sourced through Quess. These 1,600 female associates form a 90:10 ratio from intrastate vs. interstate migration.

#### **Sourcing strategies for interstate**

**hiring:** Numerous sourcing strategies are deployed to recruit associates, particularly from regions like Jharkhand. First strategy involves utilisation of extended vendor partners, freelancers, and small organisations in different parts of India to source potential candidates. The second strategy encompasses direct engagement of Quess recruiters to reach out to potential candidates in the districts, talukas, and villages of the state to conduct events like job fairs (job melas). For the purpose of conducting and increasing awareness about the job melas, a composite approach is adopted. Visit to local leaders such



*Job Melas*



as sarpanch or block officers aid in getting their support and make them aware about the job event. It is followed by the distribution of pamphlets and making announcements in the nearby areas about the time and place for the job mela. During these events, the recruiters address potential challenges related to language barriers, safety, accommodation, and transportation issues in the working space with the families of female candidates. Subsequently, only the genuinely interested female candidates are notified about the next steps considering the investment in training and development from the client company.

**Strategies to persuade female candidates:** In order to convince female candidates, their families, to relocate for work at a factory in Hosur, Qess recruiters engage with the candidates and their families to explain the job description, allowances and benefits like PF and ESIC, along with addressing any concerns they may have about relocation. This is crucial especially for young girls who may be stepping out for the first time in their lives. In addition, partnerships with NGOs help in convincing and providing support and guidance to the candidates and their families. This aids in addressing cultural or societal barriers to women's employment in these regions. Hence, the assistance from extended vendor partners, NGOs, local communities and leaders helps in creating a supportive environment for the candidates and their families, ensuring that their concerns are heard and addressed throughout the recruitment process.

**Strategies for onboarding experience and safety:** Qess offers support mechanisms to ensure a smooth onboarding experience for associates relocating to Hosur. The provision of bus/train tickets funded by Qess is offered for both female associates and their families to reassure them about the safety and living arrangements in terms of the accommodation with food facilities, and distance between the workplace and living places. Moreover, clear assurances regarding job details and salary payment dates are shared and Qess recruiters are present during the onboarding process to address any concerns from the candidates and their parents related to safety mechanisms at the plant and hostel.



*Induction programme for female employees  
in one of the manufacturing plants*

## *Women Representation at the Associate Level*

Implants are operational personnel who are responsible for onboarding and supporting new associates, particularly young women, at a manufacturing plant. They are allocated shifts and shop floors to effectively manage their responsibilities. These implants play a critical role in ensuring a smooth onboarding process, providing support during the initial 90 days, and managing various aspects such as documentation, accommodation, and addressing queries. They are also involved in coordinating with the hostels, and ensuring that the new associates are well-supported during their initial days at the company. They make the young girls aware about the meal timings, weekly work hours and the nature of job. Additionally, they assist female associates in marking the attendance, check the payroll, salary deductions etc through Quess' WorQ app.



*Implant interactions with female associates*

**Conclusion:** The multifaceted approach adopted by Quess in sourcing, and convincing females from Jharkhand to work in Hosur helps in overcoming the social barriers. The approach taken for ensuring smooth and effective onboarding experience, the presence of implants (representatives of Quess) increases the confidence of associates at work place and hostels. Furthermore, the composition of intrastate vs interstate migration is expected to change to 60:40 in the next few years. Consequently, these attempts aid Quess in resolving the issues of early attrition and it is adopting the same approach for recruiting women for other client companies as well.

## *Insight 2*

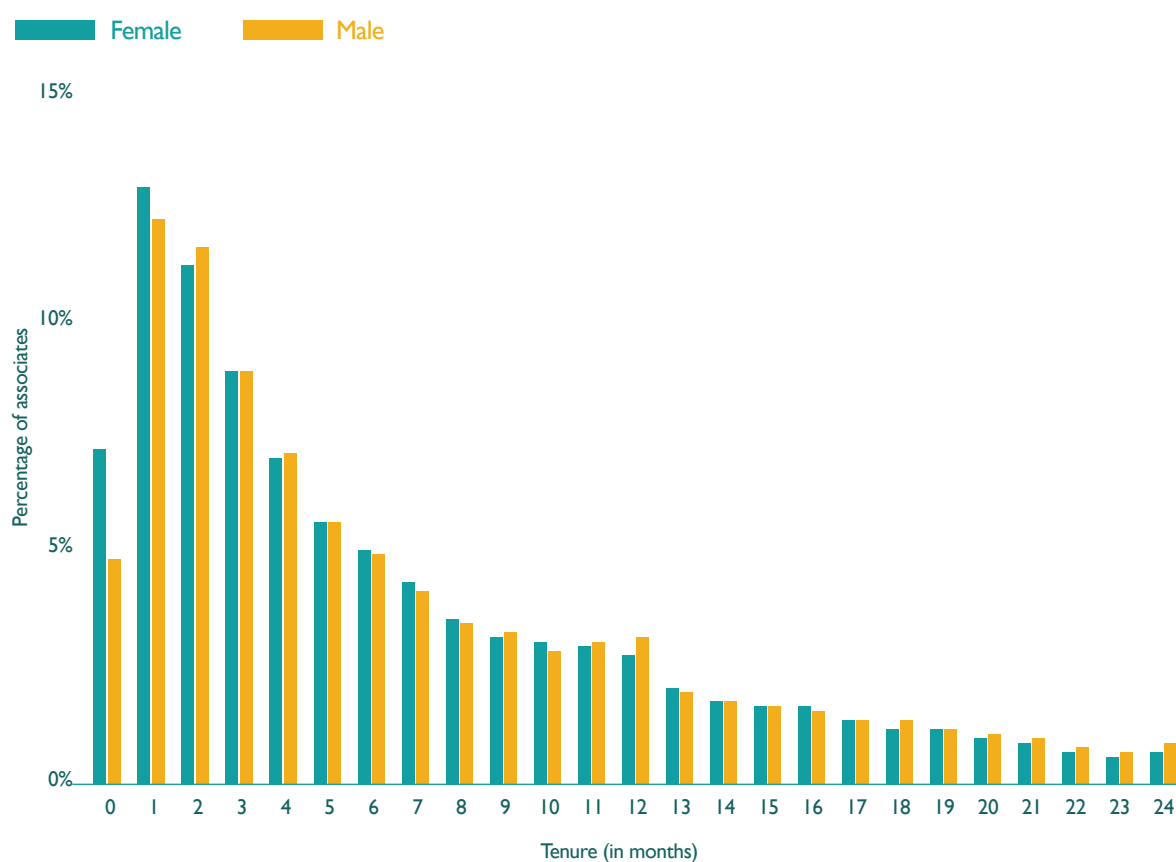
# *Higher Dropouts in the Initial Months*

*Tackling early attrition challenges and dropout rates for associates within the first 90 days can retain them for an additional 9-10 months.*

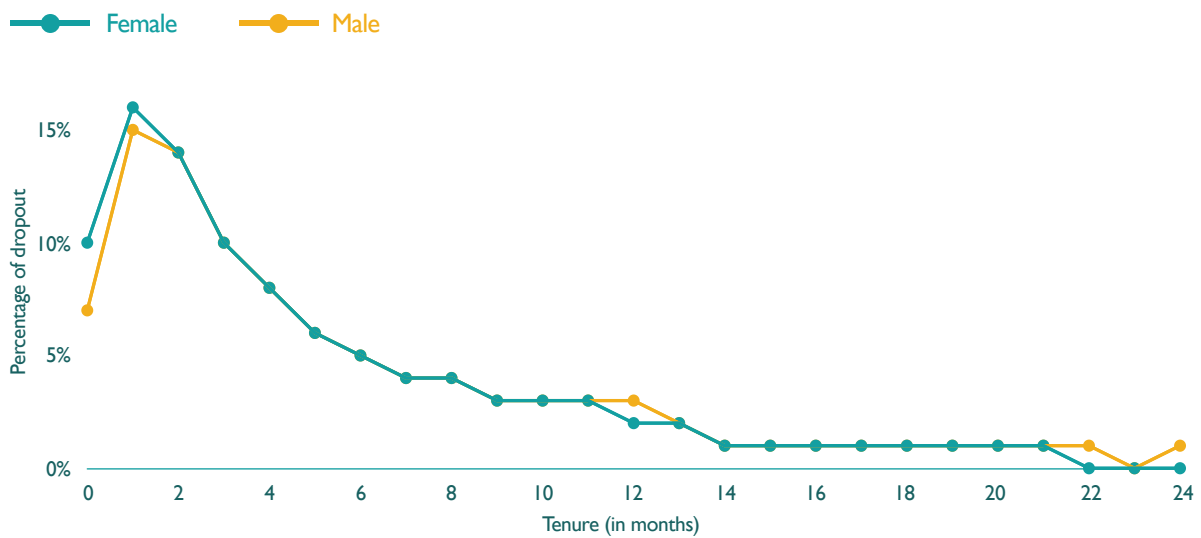


Attrition among associates is one of the key focus areas at Qess Corp. Focusing on attrition rates in the initial months of employment aid in identifying the possible reasons and in developing necessary interventions to address it. This part of the report analyses the distribution of monthly tenure of female and male associates (number of months worked). It is observed that the median duration of employment for female associates is 6 months and that of male associates is 7 months. The wider standard deviation (female S.D = 8.7, male S.D = 9.4) indicates that the employment tenure is spread out with associates working for few months to working for over a year.

**Figure 2.1** The distribution of number of months that male and female associates have worked

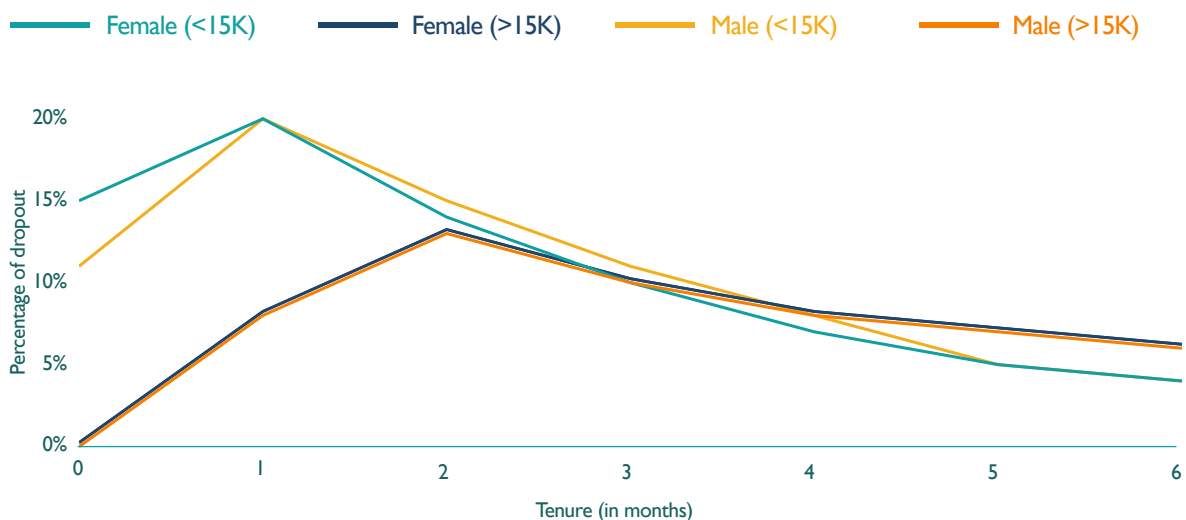


A substantial number of associates drop out within the initial 3 months duration of employment, with turnover rates decreasing thereafter. Out of total dropouts, the percentage of male dropouts in the initial 3 months (0-90 days) is 46% while the female dropout for the same duration of employment is 50%. Associates who stick to the job during the first three months, tend to continue working in the same job for longer (more than a year). Therefore, identifying and addressing the concerns faced by associates in the initial months would significantly reduce the attrition rate.

**Figure 2.2** Percentage of dropouts out of total dropouts among male and female associates across tenure

The percentage of associates dropping out in the first month of employment is higher in the low-earning category as compared to high-earning associates signalling salary to be a significant factor contributing to dropouts. After the convergence in the dropout rate at 3rd month of employment, high-earning associates' drop out more than the low-earning associates.

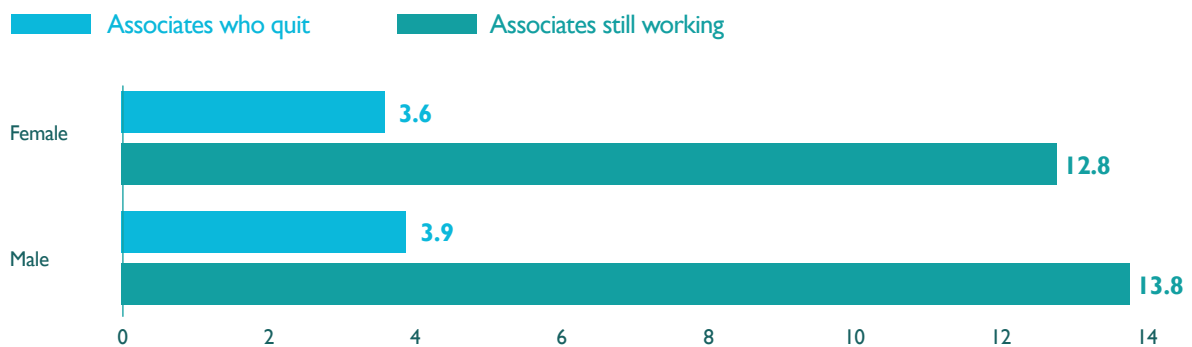
Barring the first month, the percentage of female dropouts is relatively lower than the percentage of male dropouts across 6 months in the low-earning category. Conversely, the dropout percentage is nearly similar across gender in the high-earning category.

**Figure 2.3** Percentage of dropouts across gender and pay in the initial 6 months

### Higher Turnover Rate in the Initial Months

Associates tend to stay for a longer time period if they cross the median tenure (2-4 months) of those who have quit their jobs. In addition, median tenure for females is less than the male associates in both the cases- associates who have departed and associates currently working. Hence, associates who make it past the 4th month of employment tend to stay till 13 and 14 months in case of female and male associates respectively.

**Figure 2.4** Median tenure of associates across gender and status of work



## Quess Initiatives to Address Early Attrition



**1. SARA:** The SARA chatbot is an initiative designed to smoothen the onboarding experience of associates along with recognizing the dropouts and identifying the reasons for exit, especially in the initial months of employment. With an objective of making it effortless and associate-friendly, it uses different emojis to predict and understand the moods of its associates during their employment.

Since the initiative picks out the human behavioural moods, it aids the organisation to become aware of multiple issues encountered by the associates. Hence, it helps to address both the overall problems faced by larger associates as well as by an individual associate. In addition, it supports prompt actions and speedy response to identify and tackle the issues faced by associates especially in 0-90 days of employment.

It is a unique tool which not only provides a platform to associates for the feedback but also aids Quess to contact the associate and provide a personalised support.



**2. Female Liaison Officer in manufacturing firms:** To ensure a supportive and inclusive work environment, especially for female associates, Quess employs Female Liaison Officers in every manufacturing unit (factories and shop floors). Their primary responsibility is to oversee the well-being of female associates, address any grievances they may have, and serve as a dedicated communication channel to promptly convey any issues or concerns faced by these associates. Female Liaison Officers play a crucial role in creating a safe and comfortable work environment for women in traditionally male-dominated manufacturing settings.

Complementing the role of Female Liaison Officers, Quess also employs Time Officers. These officers are responsible for handling the administrative aspects of workforce management, such as maintaining accurate attendance records for all associates across the various manufacturing units.

## *Insight 3*

# *Sector Level Insights*

*Focused initiatives to ensure workplace safety and secure living for women in the rapidly growing manufacturing sector could catalyse progress towards broader gender parity goals.*





Qess primarily serves Financial Services, Consumer Services (including retail), Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)/Durables (FMCD) and Engineering Manufacturing Process and Infra (EMPI) sectors. Across these sectors, approximately 83% of Qess's associate workforce is employed.

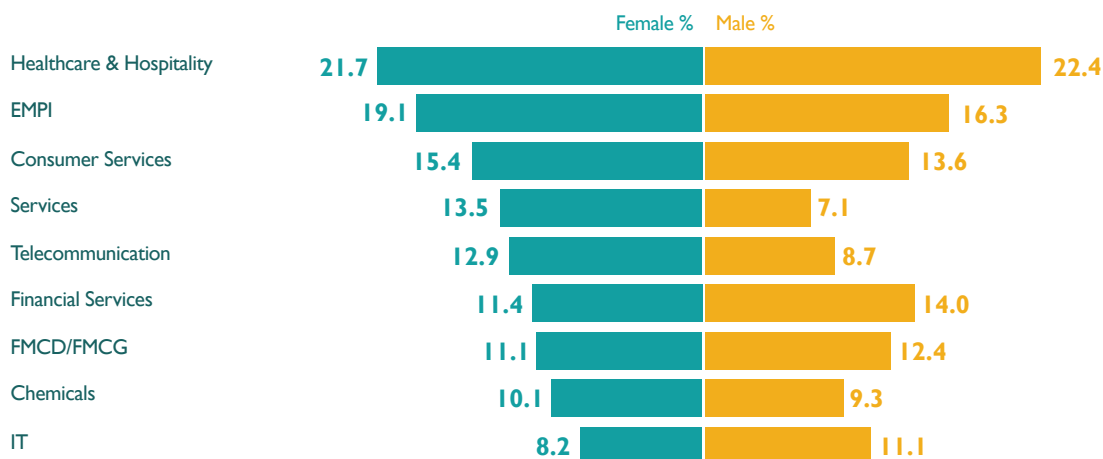
**Figure 3.1** The distribution of associates across the sectors



The data on associate turnover in the first 6 months of joining across different sectors shows higher turnover rates among female associates compared to their male counterparts, with the exception of the Financial Services and IT sectors. In the Healthcare and Hospitality sector, the turnover is quite high for both genders, with around 1 out of 5 associates leaving within the initial 6 months.

The IT and Services sectors have a higher attrition rate among male associates compared to female associates. This may indicate better retention programs or work environments for women in these industries. However, in the manufacturing sector (EMPI) female turnover rate is significantly higher than males.

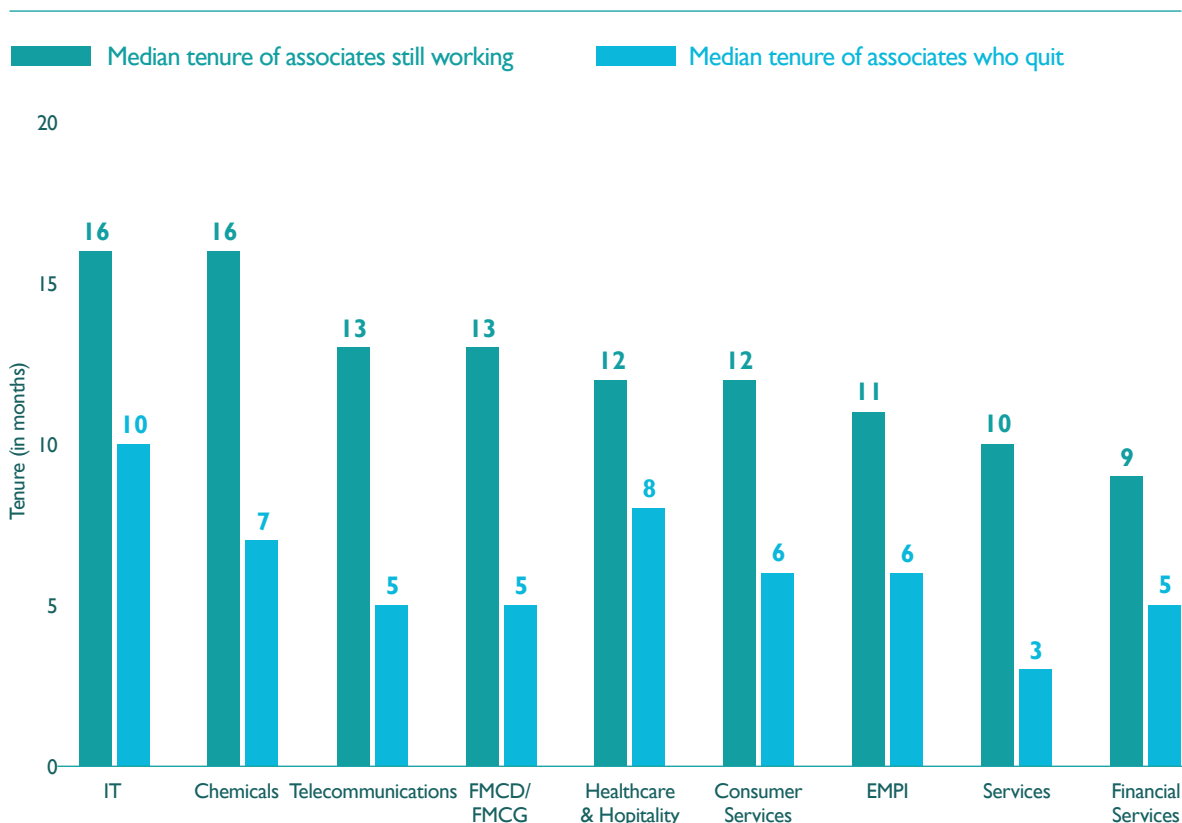
**Figure 3.2** The turnover rate among male and female associates across sectors in the initial 6 months



Further analysis of Qess payroll data revealed that associates who persevere beyond the median tenure of those who quit are more likely to remain in their roles for an extended period. The data reveals disparities between the median tenures of associates who left and those still employed across different sectors. Sectors like Chemicals, FMCG/FMCD and Telecommunications have larger gaps, ranging from approximately 7 to 9 months.

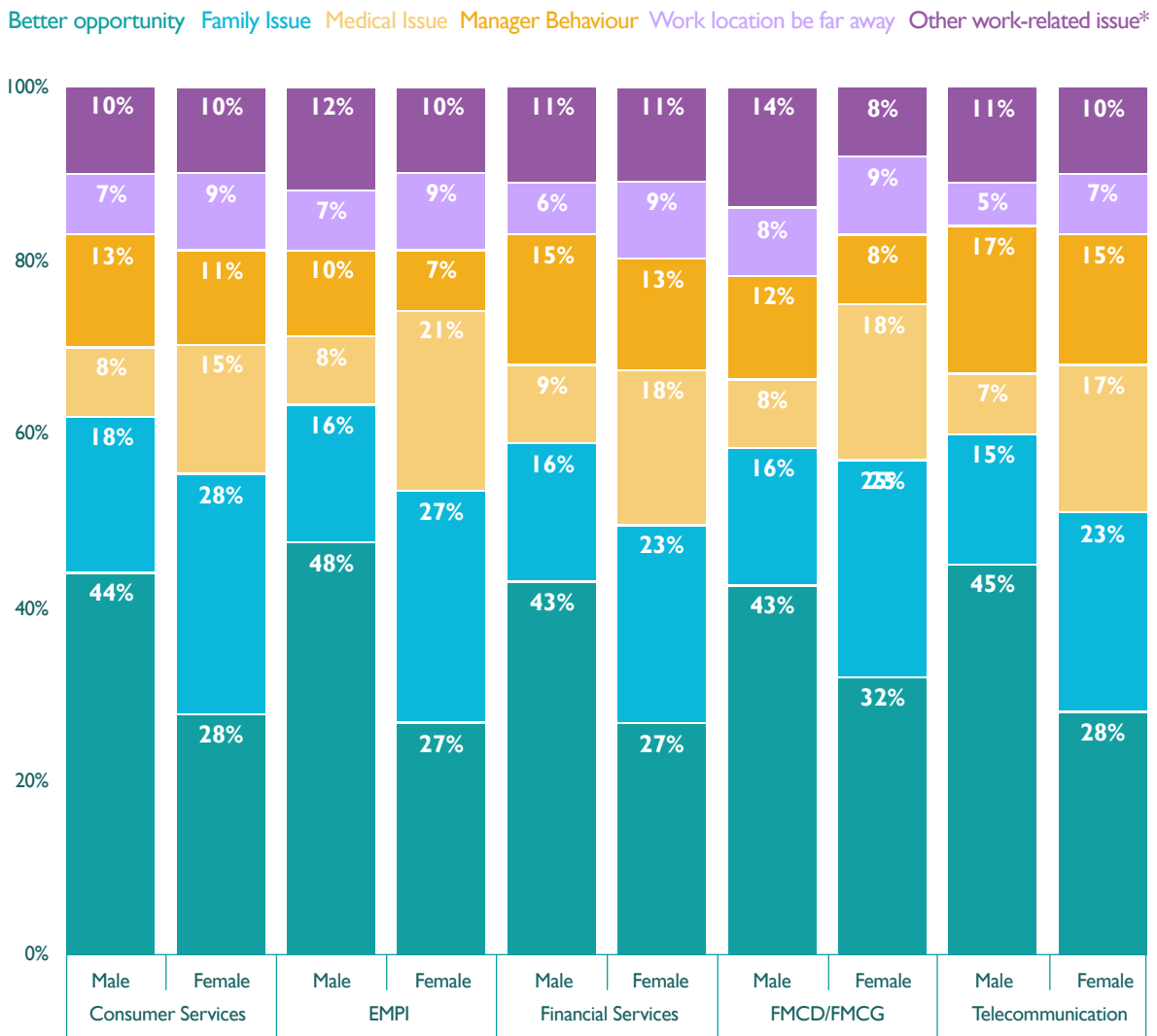
The IT sector has a relatively high median tenure of around 10 months, even among associates who quit. Whereas, the Services sector has a median tenure of 3 months for associates who quit, comparatively lower than other sectors.

**Figure 3.3** The median tenure among associates who are still employed and those who have quit across sectors



The analysis of the reasons for exit among associates using SARA chatbot data shows better opportunities as a major factor influencing associate exits across various sectors. However, there are variations in the impact of this factor on male and female associates.

In the Telecommunications sector, female associates express relatively higher concerns about manager behaviour compared to their male counterparts, while in the EMPI sector, work location is a common concern among female associates since most of the manufacturing jobs are located outside cities.

**Figure 3.4** The reason of exit among male and female associates across the sectors based on the SARA data

\*Other work-related issues includes poor work culture, lack of respect, absence of training, weekly off and timely breaks

The manufacturing sector is a key focus area for this study, as Qess manages a substantial network of over 400 industrial and manufacturing units. Furthermore, the manufacturing and infrastructure verticals have experienced the fastest growth rate at 39%, accounting for 50% of new signups and ranking third in terms of headcount, following BFSI and retail<sup>13</sup>. There has been an increase in demand for employing female associates in the Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS) compared to Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). This is because EMS jobs require technical proficiency rather than physical strength, and the minimum educational requirement has shifted from an ITI diploma to a 10th/12th pass, allowing more women to meet the eligibility criteria.

## Quess Initiatives in the Manufacturing Sector



**1. Workforce trends and automation impact:** In the manufacturing sector, the trend is the growing preference for female workers in new-age manufacturing companies, particularly in the electronics manufacturing services (EMS) industry. These companies are employing up to 80%-100% female workforce on the shop floor. In contrast to traditional manufacturing roles, the qualification requirements for these positions have also evolved, with a 12th standard education now being sufficient, as compared to the previous ITI diploma prerequisite.



**2. Apprenticeship programs:** The apprenticeship program in the manufacturing sector was seen as an opportunity to bridge the skills gap and increase absorption of women workers. It was noted that 30% of apprentices are typically absorbed into company roles, with program durations ranging from 6 months to 36 months, with a common 1-year tenure.



*Classroom training for female associates*



**3. Gender equality and welfare initiatives:** Quess, unlike in some other sectors where it operates, takes on a more comprehensive role in the manufacturing industry. Its involvement goes beyond just sourcing and payroll management; the company takes a hands-on approach to addressing the specific challenges faced by women workers in this sector. Quess deploys both male and female Liaison Officers and Time Officers at every manufacturing unit, including factories and shop floors. The composition of these officers is based on the representation of female and male associates, ensuring safety and monitoring attendance.

## CASE STUDY

# Sampoorna Rozgar Yojana

Sampoorna Rozgar Yojana is a recent initiative adopted by Qess. The workplace barriers related to infrastructure and food that prevent female associates from working have been in discussion for the past two years along with the plausible ways to address them. This entailed the implementation of the Sampoorna Rozgar Yojana initiative two months ago with an objective to resolve infrastructural issues and provide favourable living conditions to these female associates. Currently, it is operational at a small scale for an automobile facility in Pant Nagar, Uttarakhand.

The initiative provides accommodation facilities to the associates and acts as an enabler to capture the untapped potential female workforce segment especially in the manufacturing sector.



*Accommodation facility for female associates*

Sampoorna Rozgar Yojana provides dorm-style accommodations and food facilities for the associates. It also aids in addressing the challenges of location, travel and work-timings (night shifts) of the associates. In addition, it helps in providing support to migratory women in settling down in a new location and provides basic living facilities. This is expected to help Qess recruiters in hiring more female candidates to work in the manufacturing sector.

The major obstacle observed for females to enter the workforce is a safe and supportive work environment in a new city. Hence, long distances between the workplace and living place are not favoured. Qness is addressing the travel and safety challenges in two ways: (a) setting the dormitory facilities for women where it provides them with food and a safe living space, (b) liaising with partner organisations who provide accommodation facilities. Through the liaison, Qness ensures that the associates experience a smooth boarding and lodging process, along with sufficient provisions for food and safety. This is especially observed in Electronics and Manufacturing Services (EMS) where accommodation facilities like hostels or dormitories are provided near the factories or within the factory campus itself. Consequently, it supports women, especially women associates on night shifts to work comfortably and live in a safe space and resolve issues of early attrition.

**Conclusion:** According to Qness management, the initiative has received a good response in terms of the uptake in the accommodation facilities. Along with an upcoming facility in Sanand in Gujarat, Qness is planning for its next stage of increasing the capacity of such accommodations and operationalizing them at more locations. The initiative will allow Qness to recruit more women by ensuring their safety in the workplaces and in new locations.

## Insight 4

# Factors influencing Retention (Supply and Demand)

*Providing female associates with access to benefits like provident funds, employee state insurance corporation (ESIC) scheme and performance-based incentives can significantly improve their retention rates.*





## Factors Influencing Retention (Supply and Demand)

We did regression analysis to understand the association between attrition and various supply-side and demand-side factors adjusted for sector and designation. The supply-side factors incorporated into the model included age category, marital status, and location (Tier-I city vs others), while the demand-side factor considered was pay.



The older male associates, specifically those aged 40 and above, are 24% more likely to retain their jobs compared to their younger counterparts aged 25 or less. Similarly, the older female associates, specifically those aged 40 and above, are 32% more likely to retain their jobs compared to their younger counterparts aged 25 or less.



Single male associates are 13% less likely to retain their jobs compared to married men. However, single female associates are not statistically significant as compared to married women and hence, no inferences can be drawn for them.



Male associates working in tier-I cities are 26% less likely to retain their jobs compared to other cities. Similarly, female associates working in tier-I cities are 17% less likely to retain their jobs.



Male associates receiving a monthly salary above INR 15,000 are 4.3 times more likely to retain their jobs compared to those earning less than INR 15,000 per month. Female associates receiving a monthly salary above INR 15,000 are 5 times more likely to retain their jobs compared to those earning less than INR 15,000 per month.

Quess offers a comprehensive benefits package to its associates, including contributions to the Provident Fund (PF) and the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme, as well as incentives. The benefit structure aims to attract and retain talent, promote associate welfare, and foster a productive and motivated workforce.

Following are the key insights showing the association between various benefits offered and attrition adjusted for marital status and gender:

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Married women receiving the benefit of provident fund are 3 times more likely to retain their jobs as compared to married women with no such benefit.

---

Single women receiving ESIC benefits are 48% more likely to retain their jobs as compared to single women with no such benefit.





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Single women getting performance incentives are 3 times more likely to retain their jobs as compared to single women deprived of such incentive.

Married women receiving the benefit of quarterly incentives are 7 times more likely to retain their jobs as compared to married women with no such benefit.

The table shows how likelihood of retention varies when benefits are provided, considering the factors gender and marital status

Associate A the one who is receiving the benefit		Likelihood of retaining in the specific job			
		 Single men	 Single women	 Married men	 Married women
Benefits	Provident Fund	99%	61%	2 times	3 times
	Employees State Insurance Scheme	7%	48%	Not statistically significant	Not statistically significant
	Performance Incentive	66%	3 times	2 times	54%
	Quarterly Incentive	6 times	4 times	6 times	7 times

**How to read:** The reference is a hypothetical associate B who has not received the respective employee benefit. For e.g., compared to an unmarried male associate B who has not received performance incentive, unmarried male associate A, who has received performance incentive benefit is 66% more likely to retain in the specific job.

## Quess Initiatives to Increase the Awareness on Benefits



**Unified  
Health Desk**



**Awareness videos  
for benefits**



**Internal  
Compliance Officer**

Quess has designed a few initiatives to ensure that all its associates become aware about the available benefits in a timely manner. First, a Unified Health Desk stationed in Bangalore can be availed by the associates. It is a toll-free number used by associates to acquire information on any issue faced by them like benefits of ESIC and its process. Second, video clips on Health benefits and insurance are designed and shared with all the associates along with their offer letters. It helps associates to become aware and gain clarity on basic health provisions like what ESIC is, the process to avail it and the difference between ESIC and regular medical insurance. Third, the presence of an Internal Compliance Officer who is a licensing officer for every ESIC office in each zone. The responsibility of an Internal Compliance Officer is to ensure that every issue related to ESIC gets resolved in a timely period.

## About DASH

*Dash*

Benefits and  
Engagement platform

DASH is a financial lending program launched by Quess in 2021 to provide associates with access to loans and salary advances. DASH offers two lending products - loans and salary advances - through partnerships with various financial institutions. The program is applicable only to Quess associates and they can access it via the WorQ app. Eligibility criteria include a minimum tenure of 45 days for salary advances and three months of salary slips to avail loans. The financial partners determine the borrowing amount based on factors like credit score, monthly salary, and employment duration. The borrowed amount is then directly deducted from the associate's salary, either in full for salary advances or in instalments for loans.

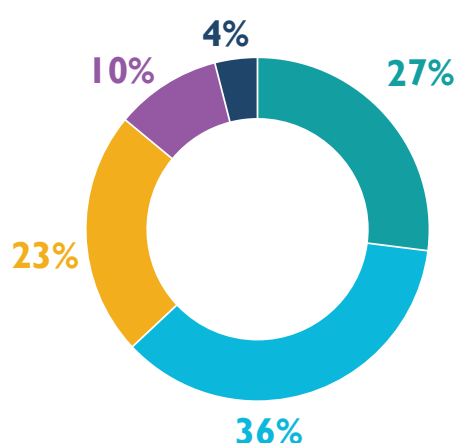
### Impact of access to credit and salary advances through DASH:

The DASH financial lending program appears to be particularly popular among young female associates in the services sector. Over half of DASH users work in industries like finance and consumer services, and two-thirds are in the 25-35 age bracket. The program seems to be relevant for associates in lower-income brackets (less than INR 15,000) as well. Geographically, most DASH users are based in southern India. The data indicates that DASH had a positive impact on associate retention. The average turnover rate is lower among female associates who have utilised the program compared to those who have not. Furthermore, among DASH users who quit, many had been with the company for over a year.

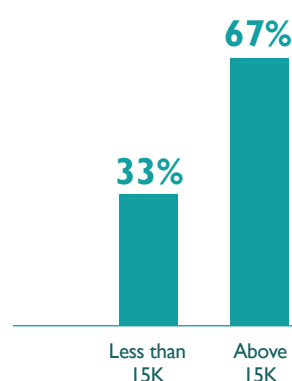
**Figure 4.1** Distribution of female associates who have availed DASH benefit across various indicators

#### Age-wise distribution

<25 years   25-30 years   30-35 years   35-40 years   >40 years



#### Distribution across pay



#### Distribution of loan amount (In INR)

Less than 5,000   5,000-10,000   10,000-15,000   15,000-20,000   Above 20,000



## *Insight 5*

# *Reasons for Exit among Associates*

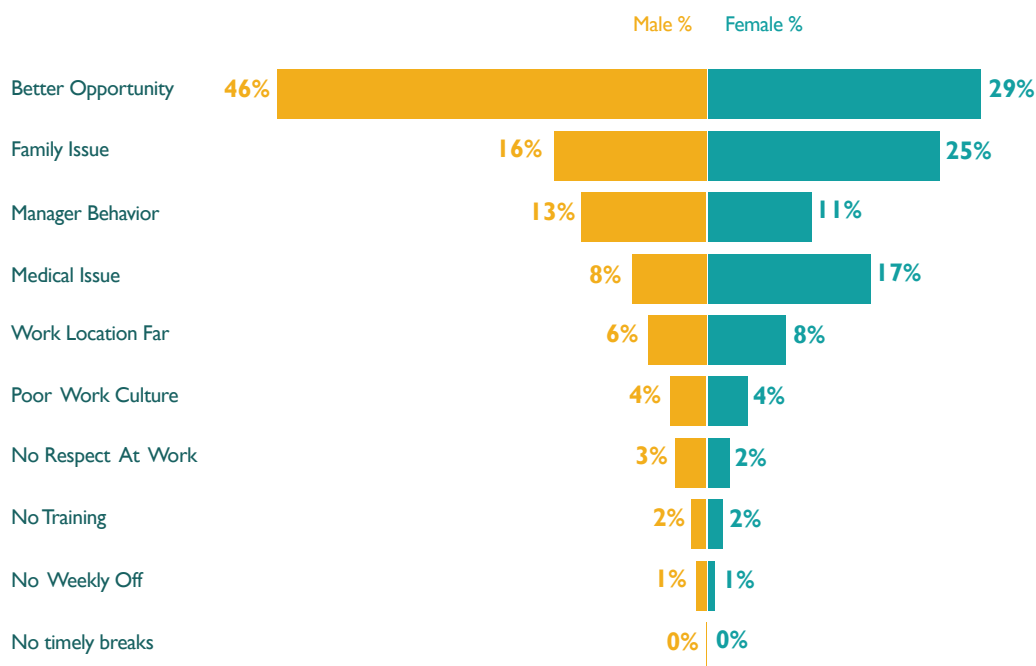
*Women cite family responsibilities and health issues as key reasons for leaving jobs, in addition to seeking better career opportunities across genders.*



SARA is a WhatsApp chatbot conceptualised and designed internally by the Quess team to enhance the associate onboarding and retention experience. Currently in a pilot phase, SARA interacts with new hires to understand their experiences during the critical first 90 days of employment. While not all associates respond to the WhatsApp chatbot surveys and prompts, it has gained a response rate of 40-50% on average, which is considered as a good response rate.

According to the insights generated from SARA data, while better career opportunity drives 43% of departures, there are distinct gender differences. Women disproportionately cite family and health issues, with 17% leaving due to medical concerns. Alongside these personal factors, work-related challenges like manager behaviour and work culture impact both men and women similarly.

**Figure 5.1** Percentage of male and female exiting due to listed reasons



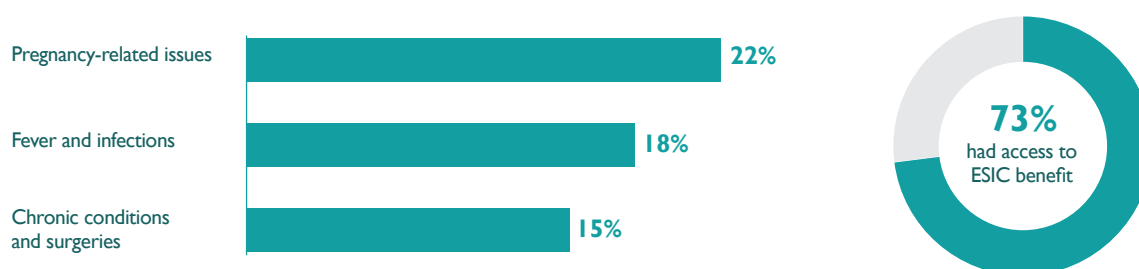
Nearly 20% of female associates exited within the first 90 days. While better career opportunity was the major reason for exit among associates overall, work-life balance and health issues emerged as prominent reasons for departure among female associates.

**Figure 5.2** Proportion of males and females exiting in the initial 90 days due to listed reasons



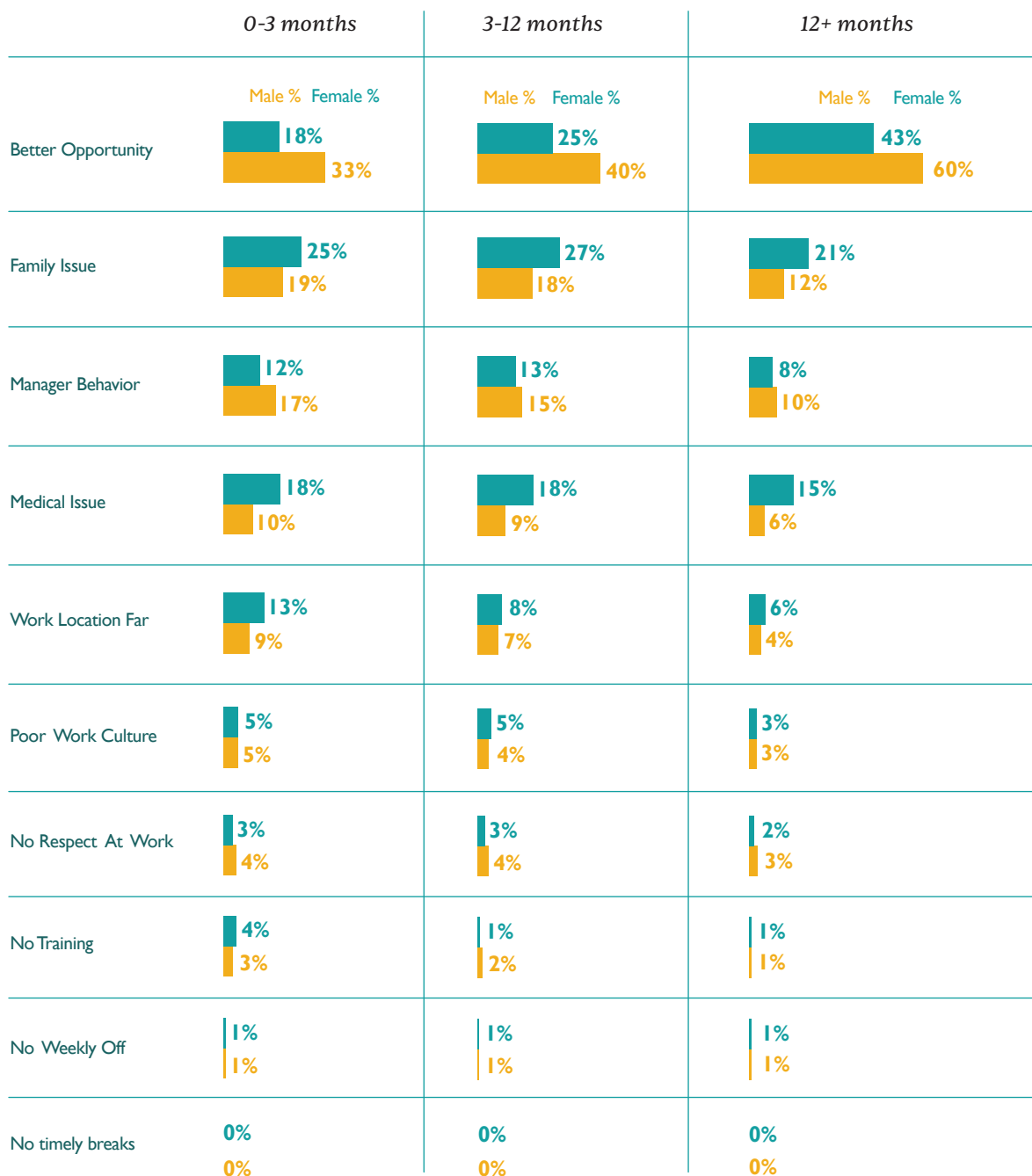
Around 17% of all resignations cited medical issues as the primary reason for quitting their jobs. Among this, pregnancy-related complications were the top concern, accounting for 22% of these cases. Interestingly, 73% of these associates who left citing "medical issues" had access to ESIC (Employee State Insurance Corporation) benefits which provide 100% of average daily wages in cash up to 26 weeks. Use of better communication tools to create awareness about benefits of the ESIC scheme could help in reducing the attrition due to medical reasons.

**Figure 5.3** Specific medical reasons stated by female associates who exited citing medical issue



Associates who stay for more than a year mostly leave for better career opportunities irrespective of gender. Male associates tend to leave primarily due to better career opportunities, and this tendency increases as their tenure with the company grows longer. In contrast, female associates consistently cite family issues as a more significant factor in their decision to exit, though the percentage of female associates citing this reason tends to decrease with longer tenure. Additionally, female associates appear to be more concerned about the distance of their work location compared to their male counterparts.

**Figure 5.4** Proportion of male and female associates stating various reasons of exit across the tenure



## Quess Initiatives to address Associate Concerns

### 1. Interaction with SARA:

The chatbot engages with associates starting 2 days prior to their join date and continuing through their exit interview, capturing moods and sentiments at key touch points such as commute, shift timings, job responsibilities, and any issues or feedback.



By analysing these associate inputs, SARA helps organisations identify potential "flight risks" - new hires who may be at risk of leaving. The insights gathered allow the team to proactively address associates challenges and improve the overall onboarding experience.

### 2. Leveraging SARA's insights to drive a 1% reduction in Quess turnover rate:

The SARA chatbot's ability to capture the exit feedback can be used to reduce attrition among Quess associates. Beyond just identifying the reasons for associate departures, SARA's proactive engagement with new hires during their critical first 90 days holds the key to addressing issues immediately and keeping more people on board.

Based on the specific challenges faced by each associate, SARA can flag these cases to the team, enabling timely interventions and personalised support. Whether it's addressing salary-related discontent, helping manage family/health concerns, or optimising work arrangements, SARA's insights can guide Quess to implement targeted solutions.



The goal is to use these data-driven strategies to drive a 1% reduction in attrition - from the current industry benchmark of 8% down to 7%. By positioning SARA as a proactive engagement and retention tool, Quess is trying to retain its workforce and enhance the overall associate experience.

# *Annexure*

## Annexure 1: Overall Payroll Data Descriptives

### Gender Disaggregated Descriptives across Age, Pay and Tenure

**1.6 million associates** in the database (2020-23)

#### Gender distribution



#### Mean age (in years)

Mean Age



Mean Age - Female Associates



Mean Age - Male Associates



#### Mean tenure (in months)

Mean Tenure



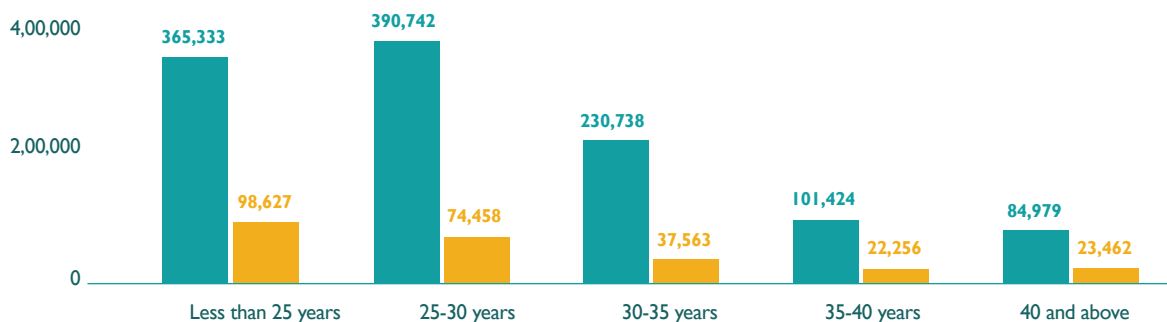
Mean Tenure - Female Associates



Mean Tenure - Male Associates



#### Age distribution



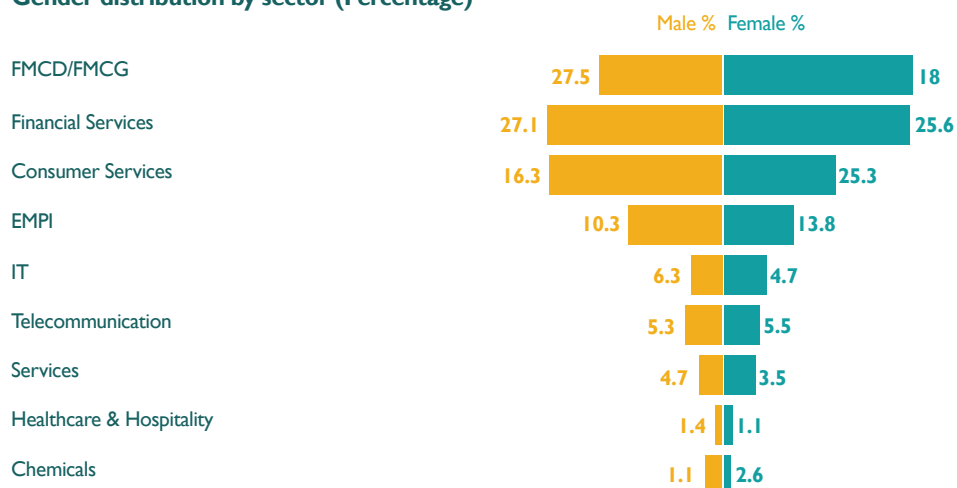
#### Median CTC: INR 14,558

Statistic	Male Associates (INR)	Female Associates (INR)
1 <sup>st</sup> Quartile	7,473	6,167
Median	14,818	13,616
Mean	15,925	14,260
3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile	21,147	18,849

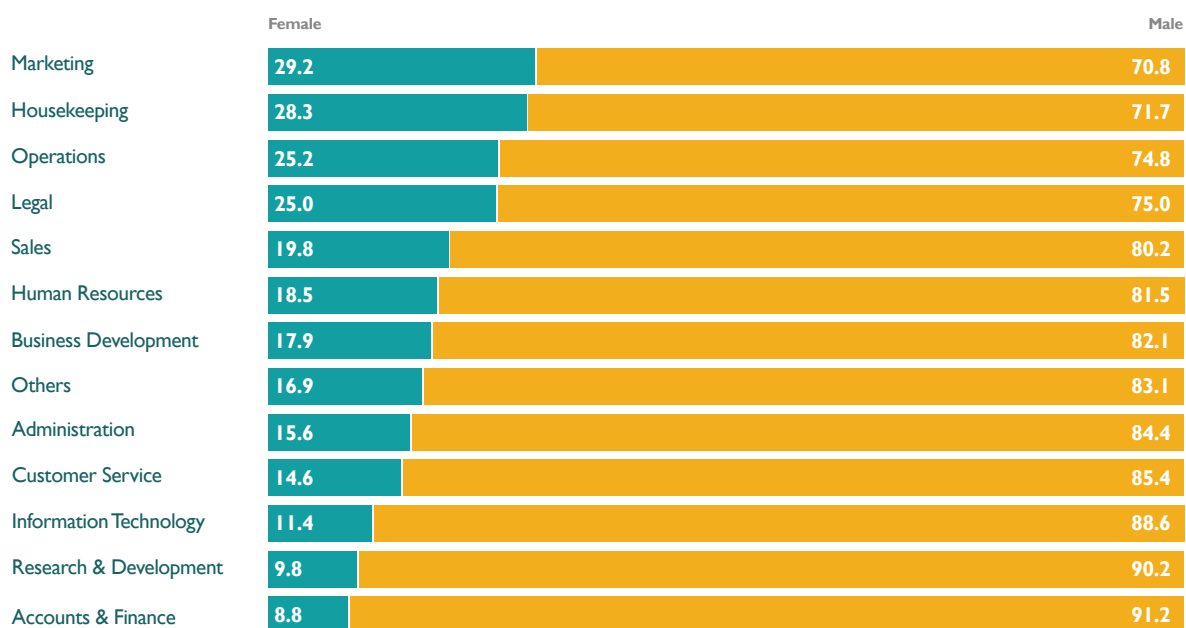
## Annexure 1: Overall Payroll Data Descriptives

### Gender Disaggregated Descriptives across Age, Pay and Tenure

#### Gender distribution by sector (Percentage)



#### Representation of male and female associates within each department



## Annexure 2: SARA Chatbot Data Descriptives

### Gender Disaggregated Descriptives across Supply and Demand Factors

**56,956 (76%) associates** in the database were mapped with the payroll data

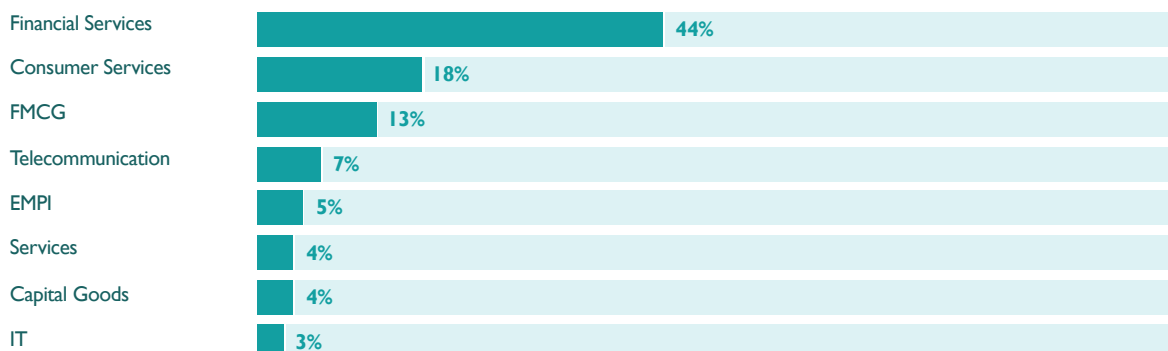
#### Distribution across:

#### Gender

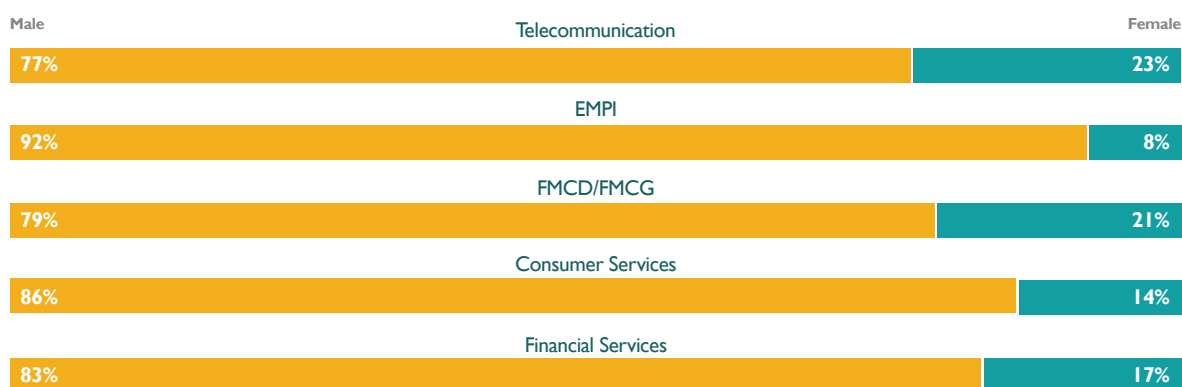


#### Sector

#### Distribution of female associates across sectors



#### Distribution of male and female associates within each sector



## Annexure 2: SARA Chatbot Data Descriptives

### Gender Disaggregated Descriptives across Supply and Demand Factors

#### Distribution across:





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