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Breaking the Glass Ceiling but not the Glass Walls: The Paradox of Equal Pay and Position

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Esteemed and dignified, the professional boardroom encapsulates a contrasting image of the world as one marked by progress and innovation. Women's rise into leadership stages has always been a stilted 'glass ceiling,' which has and continues to render their undeniable accomplishments and contributions futile. It erodes the potential for social development, organisational innovation, and economic prosperity; it is not only a gender balance issue. Even when the official rules of the company seem to favour diversity, silent structures of injustice, unstated rules, and embedded bias all operate behind the scenes to block a woman's advancement. And even though the debate is over whether women should be at the table, structural barriers still keep them from it for this reason. Since the obstacles are often unwritten, these individuals are more likely to be halted through unconscious bias and accepted norms instead of being laid down by business regulations. The salary gap and gender discrimination are still widespread problems affecting women in all fields and occupations. Even though women's rights have evolved with time, the advancement of workplace gender equality has not kept pace. There are many barriers that women face at work, and these barriers last a long time. Women offer different perspectives, innovative problem-solving methods, and holistic leadership. When women participate in leadership roles, there is an excellent opportunity for solutions to challenging issues, more inclusive decision-making, and better representation of client markets. This paper explores women's barriers to pursuing leadership, examining the glass ceiling and the lateral restrictions of glass walls that limit women to specific positions. It attempts to resolve the paradox of progress—where women succeed—by examining sociological theories, historical trends, and workplace dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Women in all fields and positions continue to face gender discrimination and the wage gap. Gender equality in the workplace has been a gradual outcome of advancements in women's rights throughout the years. The obstacles that women encounter in the workplace are numerous and enduring. Even though business activity in India has increased significantly, the percentage of women in leadership and decision-making roles is still unacceptable. Indian states are still approaching a point where we may gradually break through the glass ceilings. More concerning, though, is that we still haven't broken through the glass ceiling and arrived at a level of equality where women in the business world are valued and acknowledged. This is true even though India has had its independence for seventy-five years. The glass ceiling is an invisible economic and positional barrier that prevents women from advancing to higher managerial or executive roles, even when they possess the necessary qualifications and capabilities. It symbolises professional and hierarchical limitations restricting upward mobility within organisations and industries, especially in male-dominated environments.

Similarly, the glass wall represents societal and cultural constraints that force people into professions or fields characterised by gender conventions and stereotypes. Unlike the vertical restriction of the glass ceiling, the glass wall represents horizontal segregation that bars one from accessing many opportunities, networks, and support systems and isolates the individual from the role that would further advance and empower. These barriers point to a systemic challenge women face when navigating professional hierarchies and societal expectations. Business organisations claim to have difficulty retaining their most talented female employees, yet the glass ceiling's continued existence speaks volumes for the women who enter the corridors of power. The number of people who attempted to climb the ladder to power and women's lives demonstrates that overcoming the glass ceiling requires a deep understanding of the overt and covert barriers to career advancement that women encounter and the strategies that corporations and women must employ to overcome them.

The term "glass ceiling" refers to the imperceptible, artificial hurdles that prevent women from occupying high executive positions.[1] This expression refers to the circumstances that keep women at the bottom of the economic pyramid. The history of women in the workplace is one of an uphill battle for equality. It has been history since the beginning of civilisations, even to the modern age, with women being part of vital circles in all sectors-albeit to help spur growth in the economy, social development, and cultural advancement-with a journey that was riddled with systemic discrimination, unfair remuneration, and limited opportunities. Nonetheless, women have consistently dismantled obstacles, dispelled misconceptions, and established niches for themselves in the workplace. History was written by people who undervalued and dismissed women. This makes it very difficult to find records of women, let alone their lifestyles or accomplishments. From the financial independence of matriarchal societies to the dehumanising impacts of colonisation and patriarchy, women have fought virtually to rediscover their rightful place in the professional and social spheres. Despite centuries of marginalisation, their contributions and achievements pave the way for a more equitable future, proving that progress is inevitable when courage meets perseverance.[2]

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to shifting economic and social situations in developing countries like India, women must now work regardless of their social status, religion, or class. It also raised related issues, such as how to handle the job environment and adjust to family life. The purpose of this paper was to examine gender issues in the Indian environment, including sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and gender stereotypes.[3] Since liberalisation, more educated middle-class women have been employed in India. Despite this, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions and decision-making bodies. Although the image of the perfect woman as a housewife has been replaced by one that idealises women of substance, a woman's role in the household is still vital. It is considered key to defining Indian culture.[4]

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[1] US Department of Labor, *A Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative* (1991)
[2] Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide* (Princeton University Press 2003)
[3] Neeraj Kaushik et al., 'Equality in the workplace: a study of gender issues in Indian organisations' (2014) 33(2) Journal of Management Development <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-11-2013-0140> accessed 03 June 2025
[4] Namrata Gupta, 'Women in STEM in India: Understanding Challenges through Social Constructionist Perspective' (2022) 67(9) American Behavioral Scientist <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221078518> accessed 03 June 2025

Srinivasa & Y. S. Siddegowda (2015).[5] In their research work, 'Recent Trends in Women Empowerment,' Women's empowerment is one of the most critical issues of our day. According to the analysis, numerous leaders and saints have fought for women's rights in India. The research paper discusses several worldwide conferences to assess the current state of affairs and lay the groundwork for women's empowerment in all spheres of society. It becomes clear that, in a growing country like India, women's empowerment is a multifaceted issue that necessitates the active involvement of numerous stakeholders. The researcher examines several constitutional protection and promotion policies created and implemented to empower women. Women's studies have become a significant area of the Indian corporate sector. Recently, several creative strategies have been used to guarantee women's empowerment in all spheres and equality of opportunity. In India, gender justice is regarded as an absolute necessity. The study concludes that several initiatives aimed at empowering women in all spheres, particularly the corporate world, are being developed. According to her research, women are the most prosperous business owners in today's male-dominated culture. She also talks about women's challenges while beginning a business and the issues they face daily. The study also highlights the notable rise in the number of female entrepreneurs, new occupations, new duties, and novel experiences full of challenges.[6] According to the research, discriminatory stereotypes or a lack of networking opportunities in prestigious corporate circles typically deter women from trying to acquire high-profile positions. Numerous studies have shown that women who want to serve on boards in various organisations face practical obstacles. Furthermore, to be nominated for a board post, women frequently need to achieve higher academic scores than men.[7]

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Still, decades of women's rights and workplace policies that emphasise equality have not been able to eliminate the systemic barriers confronting women in corporate settings, for example, the "glass ceiling" and "glass walls" that block the path to achieving leadership positions and equal pay. Societal norms, unconscious biases, and structural inequalities further complicate the barriers that become obstacles to women's professional growth, isolating them in stereotypical roles. While companies proclaim that they value diversity and inclusion, the pay gap persists;

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[5] *Ibid*

[6] G Aruna Devi, 'A Study On Women Enterpreneurs In Sivakasi Taluk' (2016) 2(7) International Education and Research Journal <https://ierj.in/journal/index.php/ierj/article/view/351> accessed 03 June 2025

[7] *Ibid*

underrepresentation in decision-making positions and lateral segregation show a paradox of progress: women succeed but are kept within invisible limits. This research aims to deal with these obstacles and to examine ways of obtaining meaningful gender equality at work.

OBJECTIVES

The following are the main goals of this study:

- Exploring the systematic barriers that impede women from rising to leadership posts and equal compensation in corporate areas.
- An analytical study of the "glass ceiling" and "glass walls" regarding the sustenance of gender-related discrimination.
- Analysis of social, cultural, and historical influences toward the marginalisation of women in the workplace.
- To furnish statistical evidence about workplace disparities, focusing on pay parity, leadership representation, and job satisfaction.

HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis 1: The "glass ceiling" and "glass walls" strongly limit women's upward and lateral mobility in corporate hierarchies, regardless of their qualifications and capabilities.

Hypothesis 2: Systemic gender discrimination, unconscious biases, and cultural stereotypes are the causes of the persistent pay gap and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.

Hypothesis 3: Full-scale gender sensitisation policies, mentoring, and structural reforms can decrease workplace inequalities and increase the efficiency and innovativeness of an organisation.

DECODING THE DUAL CHALLENGE: EQUAL PAY AND EARNED RESPECT

For many years, gender equality in business settings has been an ongoing subject for discussion and reform in most nations, including India. Economic development depends on making efficient use of the whole workforce. According to Ejaz Ghani, gender equality is not only an essential aspect of human rights but also has the potential to be a powerful tool for sustaining

more rapid and equitable economic growth. Despite India's financial success, he notes that the country still has one of the lowest gender balances in economic involvement globally.

Women have gained more workplace representation, and overt pay gaps have decreased. However, the equal pay paradox has been inhibiting absolute workplace equality. In many organisations, even when women have reached comparative pay scales to their male counterparts, they still do not get the status regarding authority, recognition, and respect in leadership and decision-making roles. This paradox underscores deep-rooted structural and cultural biases in Indian workplaces based on masculine stereotypes and entrenched traditional norms that constrict professional hierarchies. The issue is pay equity and the social and professional value attributed to women in corporate spaces.

Women in leadership face challenges such as microaggressions, exclusion from influential networks, and underestimation of their capabilities, which hinder their ability to exercise equal influence and authority. Such barriers are detrimental to an individual's career, and failing to tap into a diverse workforce fully does not benefit organisations by stagnating their growth and innovation. Thus, such a paradox calls for a multidimensional solution rather than only addressing the issue of pay equity to promote respect, inclusion, and equality among women in India's corporate world.

More illumination about this paradox would be developed by conducting ground-level research, and the data that could be obtained may reveal more factors that can lead to inequality and the proposed solutions.

Q1. In your opinion, how often do organisations achieve pay parity between men and women in similar roles?
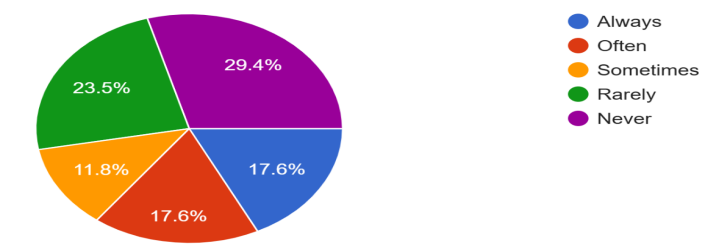
Most answers gravitated towards "Rarely" and "Never," demonstrating the general sentiment that pay parity is seldom achieved. This correlates to the recurrent challenges of unconscious bias, lack of transparency, and institutional barriers that limit equal pay. Despite the strides taken in terms of gender equality, deep-seated structural inequalities and cultural norms continue to impact pay equity across organisations.

Q2. What is the most significant barrier to achieving pay parity for women?
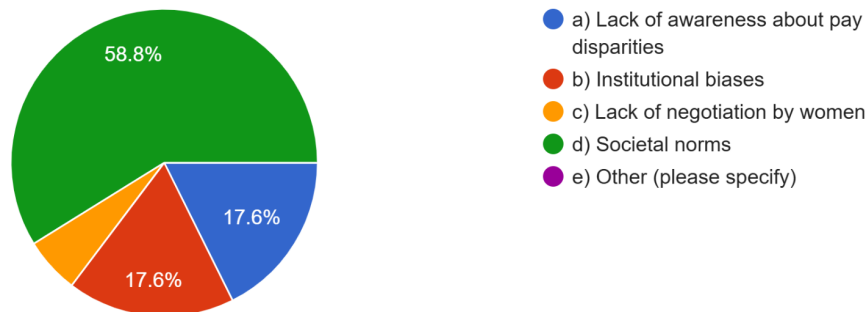
The most common barriers were "societal norms" and "institutional biases." These responses reflect how cultural attitudes and entrenched systems propagate inequality and foster consideration in hiring, promotions, and salaries. Institutional bias and societal expectations feed on each other, resulting in an environment where women find it challenging to be portrayed as equal contributors.

Q3. How would you describe the representation of women in leadership roles in your organisation?
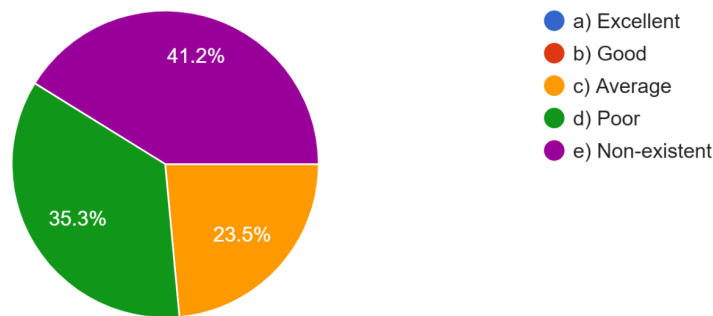
Most responses indicated "Poor" or "Average" representation, with some citing "Non-existent." This shows that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, reflecting both

horizontal segregation (glass walls) and vertical barriers (glass ceilings). Organisational structures and traditional gender roles often limit women's advancement into senior positions, even when they are qualified.

Q4. Do you think women in leadership roles are treated with the same respect as their male counterparts?
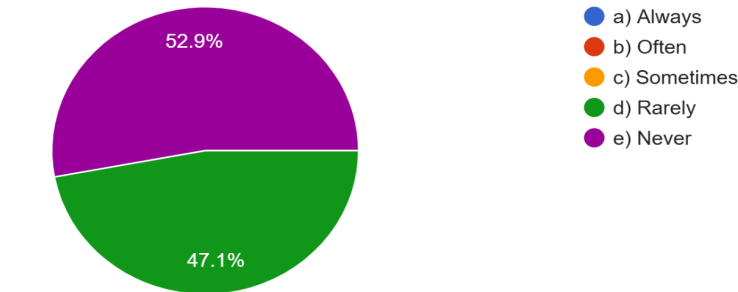
Most respondents answered "Never" or "Rarely," highlighting that women in leadership positions are still far from earning respect comparable to their male counterparts. This disparity probably results from unconscious biases, workplace cultures, and gender stereotypes that undermine women's authority and decision-making roles.

Q5.What do you believe contributes the most to a lack of respect for women in the workplace?
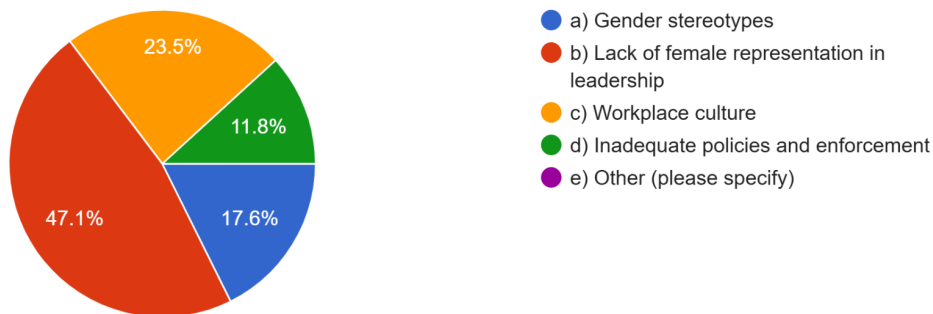
"Workplace culture" appeared as a recurring theme, followed by "Inadequate policies" and "Lack of female representation." These indicate that a change in organisational settings and policy infrastructure is needed for respect for women. A culture of workplace disrespect or undervaluing of women as a norm sets up a hostile environment that maintains inequality.

Q6. How important is respect in the corporate sector alongside position when addressing workplace equality?
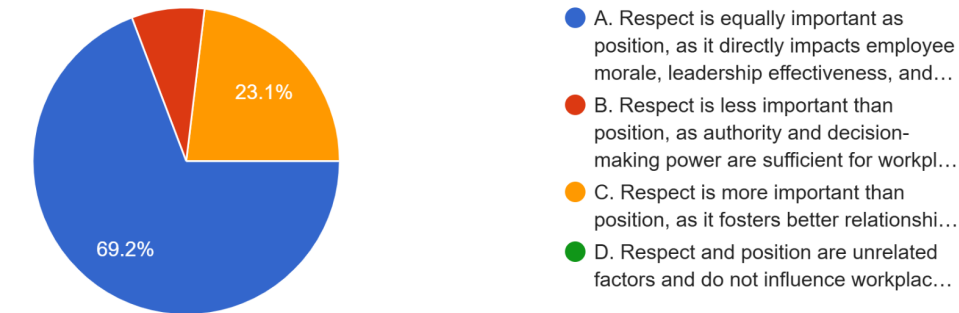
Most respondents agreed that "Respect is as important as position," stressing that it directly relates to employee morale, leadership, and organisational culture. A minor preference was seen for "Respect is more important than position." Other options registered very little support because most agree that respect and position are complementary and necessary elements of workplace equity. Respectful behaviour promotes cooperation, trust, and inclusion and solidifies the use of positional authority. Without respect, no position can motivate or lead teams well. This emphasises the importance of organisations ensuring that respect does not lag behind positional emplacements when equalising participants to ensure effectiveness and performance.

The responses from the survey reflect the persistence in the struggle towards workplace equality in the corporate sector, particularly by addressing the equal pay paradox regarding women. An underrepresentation of women in leading positions and their lack of respect when they assume such positions signifies the need for more profound organisational, cultural, and structural changes. The findings go beyond the remit of redressing the pay gap to achieving workplace equality. Respect becomes a critical consideration in addition to position, influencing employee morale and leadership effectiveness through its impact on organisational performance. Building an inclusive work culture, installing strong policies, and ensuring equal and balanced representation across the leadership will deconstruct the glass ceilings and walls that confine women in their pursuit of success. Workplace equality could serve not as a statement of fairness but as the means to fully unleash a diverse workforce's creativity, collaboration, and performance. Ground-level research and application methods in solving these issues can pave the way for a more equitable and respectful corporate environment.

The Equal Pay Paradox: Bridging the Gap in Leadership and Compensation: Around the world, workers eagerly await their pay cheques. Although receiving a wage cheque might be a source of comfort, contentment, or happiness, it can also serve as a harsh reminder of the ongoing disparities between men and women on the job. The gender pay gap is 20%, which means that women are paid 80% of what men are paid. The disparity is considerably more pronounced among women of colour, migrant women, women with impairments, and women with children. By 2030, 342.4 million women and girls will subsist on less than $2.15 daily if trends continue.[8] According to the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, all workers have the right to equal compensation for labour of equivalent worth, which includes various types of work deemed to be of equal value and identical duties. This distinction is vital because professions performed by men and women may have different requirements, abilities, duties, or working circumstances, but they are equally valuable and should be compensated equally.

Globally, women provide three more hours of caregiving per day than men. This covers domestic duties, including cooking, cleaning, obtaining water and firewood, and caring for young and older people. Despite being the foundation of prosperous families, communities, and economies, care labour is underappreciated and under-recognised. Use the UN Women's unpaid care calculator to determine your daily burden. The maternity penalty makes pay inequality worse by putting working moms at a disadvantage, which widens as a woman's kid count rises. Reduced working hours, employment in lower-paying, more family-friendly professions, hiring and promotion choices that penalise mothers' careers, and a dearth of programs to assist women in returning to the workforce after unemployment are all associated with lower income for mothers. The gender wage gap is also maintained by discriminatory hiring practices and promotion choices that keep women from achieving high-paying and leadership positions.

Because it is a flagrant injustice that condemns millions of women and families to lifetimes of ingrained poverty and opportunity disparities, pay fairness is essential. Women's lower labour force participation rates, higher rates of temporary and insecure labour, and informal employment are the leading causes of their much poorer social protection coverage than males. Women's lower incomes, savings, and pensions, as well as gendered poverty in old age, are all influenced by these variables. Since those who earn the least are the ones most harmed by

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[8] Alice H Eagly and Linda L Carli, 'Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership' (2007) 85(9) Harvard Business Review

income disparity, the battle for equal pay and pay equality assumes a new urgency as more women fall into poverty. We must provide female employees with the same opportunities as male employees. It needs policies that promote acceptable employment for everyone to close the gender wage gap. This includes policies that encourage the informal economy to become more formalised, putting unorganised workers within the legal and practical protection system and giving them the tools they need to safeguard their interests effectively. A key component of the answer is defending employees' rights to collective bargaining and organisation. To enable legislation that creates complete frameworks for gender equality in the workplace, women must be included in company and union leadership.

GENDER DIVERSITY IN CORPORATE INDIA: PROGRESS ON BOARDS, CHALLENGES IN MANAGEMENT

An important turning point for the representation of women directors in corporate India was the implementation of the Companies Act (2013) in 2015. This Act mandated that at least one woman serve on the board of every publicly traded company. The policy's rapid impact was demonstrated by the fact that, within a year of the Act's implementation, the proportion of public companies having no women on their boards fell from 53% to less than 10%. Additionally, in only one year, the percentage of women on boards quadrupled from 5%. India continues to lag behind international standards despite these advancements. By 2021, India's average percentage of women on boards was a little over 17%, less than the over 20% global average. It lagged well behind nations like France, where women accounted for more than 43% of board seats. The presence of women in managerial positions is more worrisome. Compared to the global average of approximately 33 per cent, women held just 17 per cent of senior and middle management roles in India in 2019. The effect of gender representation on corporate boards on business performance is a topic of intense continuing discussion, with conflicting data from various national and international contexts. According to a 2018 global survey, the financial success of companies and the proportion of women on boards are strongly positively correlated.

Within a year following the implementation of the board requirement, we not only saw a significant rise in the proportion of women on most businesses' boards, but interestingly, the typical firm had gradually employed many more people than was required. By 2023, around 16 per cent of boards were made up of women. This may have demonstrated companies' benefits

from appointing more female directors, a topic we address in our article. Regretfully, senior executive positions did not benefit from the beneficial changes on boards. Over the five years after the board requirement, the percentage of women in C-suite roles was constant, fluctuating between 15 and 18 per cent. Even worse, in 2023, there were still no women in the senior executive positions of almost half of the companies listed on the NSE. The Companies Act of 2013 was a significant step toward increasing gender diversity in corporate India, as its mandate resulted in immediate and measurable progress on board representation. However, the lack of substantial improvement in women's representation in senior management and C-suite roles underscores the policy's limitations alone. Achieving accurate gender equity requires addressing more profound structural and cultural barriers, such as unconscious bias, unequal access to opportunities, and limited support for women in leadership pipelines.[9]

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUITY: STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN THE CORPORATE LANDSCAPE

Even with advancements throughout time, women continue to be disproportionately underrepresented. Women may find it challenging to enter the field due to systemic gender hurdles such as cultural standards, lack of educational opportunities, and unconscious bias. Because of the various types of gender inequality that exist, the workplace has occasionally been described as an unwelcoming environment for women. According to our study, three main obstacles work together to prevent more women from holding senior leadership positions: organisational, personal, and social. We have discovered a crucial subset of organisational structural and cultural constraints within this framework.[10]

Structural Barriers –

Differential Sponsorship Accessibility: Research reports the existence of a gender predisposition in sponsorship and mentoring wherein males are, at times, openly endorsed and helped to take ownership of their jobs. At the same time, females have been told they must adapt and alter themselves if they want to win. Additionally, men attain greater active sponsorship, which includes sponsorship through senior-level sponsors who further help advance. In

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[9] Ronald J Burke and Mary C Mattis, *Women on Corporate Boards of Directors: International Research and Practice* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2000)

[10] 'Women in Business 2025' (*Grant Thornton*) <https://www.grantthornton.global/en/insights/women-in-business/women-in-business-2025/> accessed 03 June 2025

comparison, women have advice that does not yield actionable support. This gap can be bridged with the establishment of formal sponsorship programs, including well-defined purposes, fair balancing of sponsors with sponsors, and accountabilities that should ensure mutual advantage from the transaction. These approaches can assist in bridging such a fundamental gender gap in professional career advancement.[11]

Weaker Contacts: Informal professional contacts by gender and often by race prevent women from fully accessing critical information and mentorship, and lead to influential decision-makers. Unlike men, whose social and professional networks frequently overlap, women maintain separate networks, which require additional effort and time. This segregation limits women's ability to build the relationships necessary for career growth. Organisations can mitigate this barrier by creating formal opportunities for women to interact with high-status executives across various functions, regions, and departments. The playing field may be levelled with structured programs that involve executives actively bringing women into contact with powerful connections.

The "Trailing Spouse": Global mobility is often a precondition for career advancement in multinational corporations, which is difficult for women. While more men assume that their female partner will put their career on hold, fewer women feel confident that their male partner would do the same. This dynamic makes it difficult for women to accept international assignments, limiting their advancement possibilities. Organisations can opt for alternative models of global experience, such as virtual team leadership, short-term international assignments, or project-based travel. This reduces the demand for permanent relocation and makes the roles more feasible for women.

Cultural Barriers[12] –

Always Available Culture: Senior leadership positions are often linked to 24/7 availability and complete geographic mobility, creating additional burdens on women who already perform a disproportionately larger share of caregiving and domestic responsibilities. This "always-on" expectation can discourage women from pursuing leadership roles. Organisations that actively

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[11] World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report* (2020)
[12] Cara Connell et al., 'The Effect of Cross-Cultural Dimensions on the Manifestation of Customer Engagement Behaviors' (2022) 31(1) Journal of International Marketing <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X221130690> accessed 01 August 2025

dismantle these unrealistic demands by promoting flexible work schedules, setting reasonable boundaries for availability, and valuing work-life balance can attract and retain a more diverse talent pool.

Unconscious Bias and Gender Stereotyping: Gender bias is often embedded in the culture of the workplace, where men are preferred for leadership positions. According to research, organisations headed by male CEOs and chairs tend to be male-dominated, perpetuating inequality. The bias is often unconscious and hard to detect and address. Education and training on privilege, prejudice, and inclusive leadership, especially for decision-makers at the top, are crucial to creating a fair and equitable workplace.[13]

Everyday Sexism and Microaggressions: Many women experience subtle forms of discrimination, such as having their ideas dismissed, being held to higher standards of proof, or being mistaken for someone in a junior role. These microaggressions erode confidence, discourage ambition, and create a hostile work environment. Organisations can address this issue by fostering accountability, promoting open discussions through initiatives like "listening circles," and ensuring a culture where women feel heard and respected.

Male Competence Assumptions: Societal norms tend to attribute leadership and competency to men, especially in fields that have long been male-dominated. This has led to men being held less accountable than women for the same roles, making the playing field uneven. For example, in stereotypically male roles, men are given the benefit of the doubt, whereas women have to prove themselves constantly. Recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion processes in organisations must de-bias themselves to ensure merit-based decisions instead of stereotype-influenced decisions. This requires blind assessments, diverse hiring panels, and transparent promotion criteria.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The worldwide conversation on gender equality and inclusion has gained prominence in an era of unparalleled connectedness and consciousness, demonstrating a shared commitment to tearing down obstacles in the way of people's full potential. The quest for gender equality today

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[13] Susan R. Madsen and Maureen S. Andrade, 'Unconscious Gender Bias: Implications for Women's Leadership Development' (2018) 12(1) Journal of Leadership Studies <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jls.21566> accessed 04 June 2025

includes a more comprehensive, nuanced understanding that acknowledges and respects the wide range of gender identities, going beyond the conventional binary constructions. From historical turning points to current campaigns, the fight against gender-based discrimination resonates worldwide, inspiring civilisations to reevaluate their institutions, laws, and cultural standards.[14] The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 estimates that, with the present rate of advancement, gender equality will not be achieved for another 100 years. This forecast has been regularly employed as shock therapy to get governments, NGOs, groups, investors, and businesses to take action. Gender equality and inclusion have advanced significantly in several nations. With laws supporting equal pay, maternity leave, and women in leadership positions, Nordic nations like Iceland, Sweden, and Norway are frequently mentioned as global leaders in gender equality. Rwanda is a notable example of an African country where a significant proportion of women hold political office, indicating that advancement is not confined to particular areas.

Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, Goal 5 is to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." To accomplish this aim, governments and organisations worldwide are implementing laws and programs that address gender differences in economic opportunity, healthcare, and education.

There is more to true gender equality than a binary conception of gender. To create an inclusive society, different gender identities must be acknowledged and accepted. The road has been one of advancement, difficulties, and a changing understanding of human rights in the complex tapestry of global ideas on gender equality and inclusion. When we consider the progress achieved, it is evident that achieving gender equality is a continuous group effort rather than a single goal.

LEGAL AND POLICY DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE CORPORATE SECTOR

The legal and policy frameworks addressing women's roles in the corporate sector are integral to promoting gender equality and addressing discrimination. These frameworks include anti-

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[14] Jessica Houston Su et al., 'How Sexism in Institutions and Everyday Interactions Shapes Early Childbearing' (2024) 89(6) American Sociological Review <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241291602> accessed 04 June 2025

discrimination laws, policies supporting work-life balance, and initiatives to break stereotypes and barriers to leadership.

Anti-Discrimination Laws: Many countries have enacted laws prohibiting gender-based workplace discrimination, providing equal opportunities for all employees irrespective of gender. a. Equal Pay for Equal Work

Laws such as the Equal Pay Act 1970 in the UK and the Equality Act 2010 ensure that women and men working in similar or comparable positions should get paid equally; in countries like India, specific legislation, including the Equal Remuneration Act 1976 and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013 are concerned concerning workplace sexual harassment and pay inequality.

Affirmative Action and Gender Quotas: Affirmative action policies and gender quotas are designed to increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions. Norway, France, and Germany have enacted legislation to ensure a minimum number of women on corporate boards. Companies are also implementing internal policies, such as mentorship programs, diversity training, and targeted recruitment, to enhance gender diversity.

Parental Leave and Family Support Policies –

Parental Leave: Policies that provide maternity, paternity, or shared parental leave play a crucial role in promoting the care and welfare of women regarding balancing family and career responsibilities. For example, generous parental leave policies characterise Scandinavian countries.

Flexible Work Arrangements: Flexible work choices include remote work, part-time positions, and changed hours, thus making it possible for women to diminish the "motherhood penalty" typically experienced during their careers by taking time out to attend to family matters.

Workplace Health and Safety: Laws that address women-specific workplace needs include reproductive health, menstrual health, and protection from workplace violence. Regulatory frameworks ensure safe working environments in sectors with specific risks, such as manufacturing or hazardous material handling. While there has been significant progress on this front, it's only true gender equality within the corporation through continuous changes in legal

frameworks and corporate policies that would be achievable. Governments and organisations should address legal, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent women from being empowered in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

While the proportion of women in middle management has increased significantly over the past 20 years, there are still very few women serving as CEOs of major firms. What has prevented women from achieving success? They have interpersonal abilities, style, line experience, and excellent people skills. Even while women made some progress in the 1990s, it was most likely a reaction to the evident and atrocious behaviour of men in the business world and merely a token gesture. The cause of gender parity in the workplace has undoubtedly advanced significantly in recent decades. The number of women entering previously male-only professions, occupations, and managerial positions has continuously increased.

Their availability of higher education and training keeps improving, giving many of them the credentials they need to pursue positions in senior management. However, many outcomes don't live up to the hype. Around the world, women continue to be concentrated in the most vulnerable occupations, and breaking through the "glass ceiling" still seems unattainable for everyone but a few. The barrier to top jobs appears to be fashioned of impregnable Plexiglass for women who also face racial prejudice. The male-as-norm still seems to have a strong and sneaky hold on how people think and value things.

In organisations, many commonly used references had a history of men controlled. Two important examples are prioritising hierarchical success over other types of achievement and attributing employment primacy over different facets of life. Gender-based preconceptions, gender variations in linguistic styles and socialisation, lack of line experience, and insufficient career prospects are some of the reasons why women have not achieved the top.

It is evident that women have made modest strides toward positions of influence and power based on a review of some of the literature, a brief compilation of data on women in leadership and power roles, and a cursory examination of the lives and work of some modern women who have considered and experienced corporate leadership. According to research, this is the case because they were either deterred by sex in some way or did not want leadership roles or the

associated loneliness. Examining the history of women's advancements also reveals the discrepancy between what is happening to the misery of women in the corridors of power and what is reflected in laws or public opinion. Based on the study's findings, the various hypotheses previously framed can be analysed and validated or ascertained in parts:

Hypothesis 1: Women's upward and lateral movement in corporate structure hierarchies is limited by a combination of 'glass ceilings' and 'glass walls' even when they are highly qualified and competent.

This is proven. The research identifies profound hurdles such as unintentional prejudices, lack of access to sponsorship, absence of women in senior leadership roles, and other structural limitations like a lack of global mobility for women, which are present. Even with policy changes, women continue to be subject to gender-based vertical (glass ceiling) and horizontal (glass walls) segregation. These findings show that women cannot progress in the workplace due to operational issues rather than skill-based ones.

Hypothesis 2: The persistent underpayment and underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is a result of societal gender discrimination, cultural stereotypes, and unconscious bias.

This is proven, too. Pay gaps in society and the shortcomings of women in leadership positions can be traced back to unconscious and deep-seated socio-cultural constraints. The findings reveal that women.

Hypothesis 3: Comprehensive gender sensitisation policies, mentoring, and structural reforms can reduce workplace inequalities and improve an organisation's efficiency and innovativeness.

This hypothesis is partially proven. While gender sensitisation programs, mentorship opportunities, and structural reforms have been promising in creating an inclusive environment, the research shows these are insufficient. Organisations need to address the deeper cultural and systemic issues of the "always-available" work culture, unconscious bias, and societal expectations of women. In addition, policies must be accompanied by accountability mechanisms and leadership buy-in to create long-term, meaningful change. The evidence also

favours the idea that a diverse and inclusive workforce dramatically improves organisations' efficiency, innovation, and collaboration.

The findings from this research resonate with the message that systemic and cultural barriers continue to limit gender equity in corporate hierarchies. As overt pay gaps decrease and boards become more representative of women, it is now clear that actual equity entails overcoming structural and cultural barriers driving discrimination. Achieving workplace equality needs all of these solutions to be holistically provided through policies, mentorship programs, and cultural shifts. To break the "glass ceilings" and "glass walls," ultimately, organisations must ensure equal pay and create environments that respect and value women as leaders, decision-makers, and contributors. Doing so will not only uphold fairness principles but also unlock the full potential of their workforce, fostering innovation, growth, and sustainability in the corporate sector.[15]

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[15] Claudia Goldin, 'A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter' (2014) 104(4) American Economic Review <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.104.4.1091> accessed 04 June 2025