

Navigating Academia: Women's Experiences in the Higher Education Workforce – A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The systematic review discusses the multidimensional reality of a higher education workforce experience by the women population and integrates the global research on the multidimensional experience of women in the higher education workforce published into the scientific community between 2020 and 2025 in various institutional and cultural settings. The review will establish the barriers, enabling factors and institutional practices that come up repeatedly and tend to affect the academic career of women especially in recruitment, retention, promotion and leadership. Within the peer-reviewed aspects of literature, the research identifies some of the prevalent issues to include gender bias, share of care giving responsibilities, absence of a mentor, and segregative organizational cultures. At the same time, it also states on the possible ways forward such as the use of equity audit, open promotion process, flexible work guidelines, and gender integrative leadership training. The article has critiqued the nature of systemic and cultural factors influencing the advancement of women in academia; therefore, it demands structural changes to establish favorable and friendly conditions. Through the synthesis of information in different fields of study and in various parts of the globe, this review offers a broad perspective of how institutions of higher learning should do more in helping women succeed in the academic institution and at the workplace. The most prominent ones are structural barriers, leader underrepresentation and work life balance; inter sectionality, mentorship and institutional law. The review will end with measures to encourage inclusive and equitable academic conditions.

Keywords: Women in academia, higher education, gender equity, academic leadership, work-life balance, institutional barriers, faculty advancement, systematic review, practices and mentorship.

Introduction

Women involvement in academia has been changing within the past several decades, but their experience is still full of systemic problems. Although women constitute a major percentage of academic staff worldwide, they have remained underrepresented on the executive level, and usually experience subtleties of bias, systemic discrimination, and culture. This systematic

review evaluates the experience of women in academia, what issues are distinctive to their experiences and how higher education institutions respond to gender equity in academic environments. Experiences of women in the workforce of higher education show some improvement and continuing inequalities. Even though a lot has established themselves in the academic field, structural limitations have limited their opportunities. This requires a change of academic culture, policies and paradigms of leadership to empower the emergence of truly inclusive and equitable institutions. Institutions not only have to hire women but make them feel at home where they can excel, be leaders, and redesign the future of academia. Khan & Hollingworth (2024) explores the continuous challenges that deny the women an opportunity to rise to leadership positions in higher institutions of learning and especially the quest to foster sustainable development. According to the authors, the gendered culture at the institution and unconscious biases in addition to the absence of supportive policy frameworks still alienate women in their ability to become leaders. The study also finds structural barriers during a critical review and empirical reflections concerning male dominated networks, absence of mentorship, tokenism and work-life imbalance as significant to overcome. It also draws our attention to the practice that silences women voice in decision-making strategies and agendas of sustainability. Female empowerment as part of academia leadership, as suggested by the authors cannot only build equity but also attain larger sustainability agendas within higher educational organizations. To eradicate such deeply rooted obstacles, the article supports the idea of inclusive leader development program, gender-responsive policies, and institutional accountability. Conclusively, it requires an institutional cultural change so that elderly females can become significant participants and heads in the sustainability dialogue in academia.

Research background

Promoting gender equity in academia requires a combination of deliberate institutional strategies and proactive leadership roles. Institutions must begin by conducting regular equity audits to identify disparities in hiring, promotion, and compensation, ensuring transparency through the publication of disaggregated data. Transparent promotion and tenure policies are essential, with clearly defined and consistently applied criteria to prevent bias and favoritism. Mentorship and

sponsorship programs play a critical role in supporting women faculty, helping them navigate academic structures and build professional networks. Such programs should be formalized and include peer support mechanisms to foster community. Flexible work policies, including parental leave, tenure clock extensions, and remote work options, must be implemented without stigma, enabling women to manage career and care giving responsibilities. Leadership development initiatives targeting women faculty can help address underrepresentation in senior roles, while training for all leaders should include gender sensitivity and implicit bias awareness. Inclusive recruitment practices, such as gender-balanced search committees and anonymized applicant reviews, further support equity. However, strategies alone are not enough—leadership plays a vital role in driving change. Academic leaders must model inclusive behaviors, prioritize diversity in strategic planning, and hold departments accountable for progress. They should create environments that value collaboration and well-being, promote the visibility of women leaders, and embed equity in institutional culture. By combining structural reforms with value-driven leadership, higher education institutions can dismantle systemic barriers and cultivate inclusive, equitable academic environments where women can thrive across all levels of the academic hierarchy.

Objectives:

1. To identify key barriers impacting women's progression in academic careers.
2. To examine institutional strategies and leadership roles in promoting gender equity.
3. To synthesize evidence-based recommendations for creating inclusive academic environments.

Systematic literature review and research Agenda

A critical analysis of the available research on the work-life balance and career motivation in the perspective of Indian women is present in the systematic literature review created by Ali et al. (2025) in the professional and academic stratosphere. The authors aggregate the results of more than 70 studies and show that structural and cultural barriers such as the patriarchal norms, Yet constraints in organizational policies and dual role pressures negatively affect career

developments and personal satisfaction of women. Although more women are entering into higher education and joining the labor force, women are still grappling with time poverty, career leveling and stresses in the mind. Motivation in careers is normally compromised by absence of support systems, gendered leadership views, and poor flexible work policies. The research also notes the lack of literature, particularly on intersectionality and sector-specified knowledge. The authors present their research agenda to be conducted in the future with references to the matters of organizational interventions, gender-balanced policies, and longitudinal research. The review ends with a remark that context-based solutions must be sought to improve the career growth and well-being of women in the socio-cultural context of India.

Oliveira et al. (2025) review more than ten years of scholarship discussing the global research problem, where the common themes include performance measures, casualization, competition, and loss of academic autonomy. The vulnerable groups include females and junior scholars, who have to deal with an even stronger pressure to publish empirical research, get funds, and engage in unpaid work, with no equal rewards and protection. The review addresses the emotional strain of precarious work and increased dissonance between institutional expectations and higher educational beliefs, like collaboration, critical inquiry, and service to the public. Although the review steers clear of this important dimension of academic neoliberalism proposed by some scholars as strategic adaptation to survive, it highlights the ways how marketization tends to increase inequalities, especially gender and disciplinary. The authors urge revival of work in the academic well-being, policies of sustainable career development, as well as resisting strategies to counter the monolithic definition of academic success within neoliberal institutions.

Osman (2025) investigates the experiences of Black Muslim college students regarding their discipline in the UK through the lens of intersectional approach which considers the interaction of gender, race and religion. According to the findings, exclusion, discrimination, and identity-based marginalization occurs in academic as well as social divisions within the university life. The respondents indicate experiencing Islamophobia, anti-black racism, and cultural insensitivity among their peers and faculty and a lack of institutional support. This research demonstrates the emotional in the process of balancing between visibility and invisibility, where students are

usually hyper-visible as stereotyped, but not visible in institutional regulations and the absence of their representation. Nevertheless, in spite of these obstacles, the resilience of the students is manifested by peers networks, faith-based identity anchoring, and community-level building. Osman stresses the importance of prompt intersectional inclusivity in policy, curriculum development and support services to students. The article advocates a structural change in the higher education that takes note and redresses the multidimensional identities and lived experiences of the marginalized student sets.

Sil and Lenka (2025) examines both systemic and psychological challenges of women who pursue academic leadership and design a conceptual framework to help empower them. The authors claim that the conventional leadership system within the academic sphere is quite often conditioned by the subjective considerations with references to the gender stereotypes and the institutional patriarchy that suppress the female voice and leadership traditions. Human empowerment can be traced through qualitative perspectives and theories to the transformation of subjective limitations, including internalized inferiority, marginalization, and unstructured power relations, into objective empowerment through institutional changes, addressing through merit and universal policies. The focus is on mentoring, gender-sensitive education and the redefinition of leadership capabilities to go beyond masculine requirements. The authors go further to endorse cultural change in academia so that it becomes typical to have diversity in the top leadership. The article ends by calling on long lasting, institutional level interventions to shift away tokensim and create long lasting and meaningful participation of women in the arena of academic decision-making.

Way et al. (2024) presents the research on issues and career roads of women faculty in one of the narrower disciplines, that of hospitality higher education. By relying on qualitative data and survey findings, the authors describe a maze, not a single path, toward a career advancement, highlighting the multidimensional interaction between structural opacities, gender norms, and individual resilience. Detailed in the situation facing women in this field are lack of mentorship, few of them in the leadership body, and work-life issues compounded by conservative values of the hospitality industry where men dominate in leadership. Institutional culture is another key

factor identified in the study as many of the participating women describe the sensation of marginalization and the need to work super-hard to be heard. Nevertheless, there are women who manage to overcome the field by means of mentorship communities, flexible approaches, and enthusiasm to teach and research. The authors preach more institutional support in terms of gender equity and inclusive leadership models to promote the rise and prosperity of women in the hospitality academia.

Araneda-Guirriman et al. (2023) summarises the state of awareness in the international community of scholars regarding the presence of women in the academic life, their experiences and challenges. Referring to more than 100 scholarly works, the researcher notes that gender bias, low representation in leadership, unequal access to research, and even institutional cultures that seem to reinforce the dominance of the male gender, recur similarly across the studies. It points out the fact that women tend to be slower to promote, gave more responsibility in care provision compared to that expected, and are not adequately credited with academic work. Although there are progress in the gender equality discourse all over the world, there are still a number of structural and cultural obstacles that are deeply rooted. The authors highlight the variety of experience in women in the different regions and by the disciplines especially those in the Latin American settings. They also present the importance of mentorship, changing policies, and inclusive institutional leadership. The review provides a multidimensional perspective on future research to construct more equitable research spaces, offering new insights on the need to consider a multidimensional view that requires the integration of intersectionality, longitudinal study, and examining the effects of policy on the future research. Finally, it presents the issue of academic reform as the key to making all the potential of female scholars equal to that of their male counterparts all around the world.

Gonzalez & Nielsen, A. (2024) explores various teaching strategies used in clinical education to enhance the development of clinical judgment among nursing students. Clinical judgment is vital for safe and effective nursing practice, yet traditional educational methods may not adequately prepare students for real-world decision-making. The authors synthesized findings from multiple studies to identify evidence-based strategies that effectively foster critical thinking and clinical

reasoning. Key approaches include the use of simulation-based learning, case studies, debriefing sessions, reflective practice, and concept mapping. The review highlights how these strategies, particularly when combined, create active learning environments that mimic clinical complexity and support the development of judgment skills. The authors emphasize the importance of faculty guidance, feedback, and scaffolding during these learning experiences. They conclude that clinical educators must intentionally integrate diverse, interactive methods that challenge learners and promote deeper thinking to better prepare nursing students for the dynamic and unpredictable nature of clinical practice.

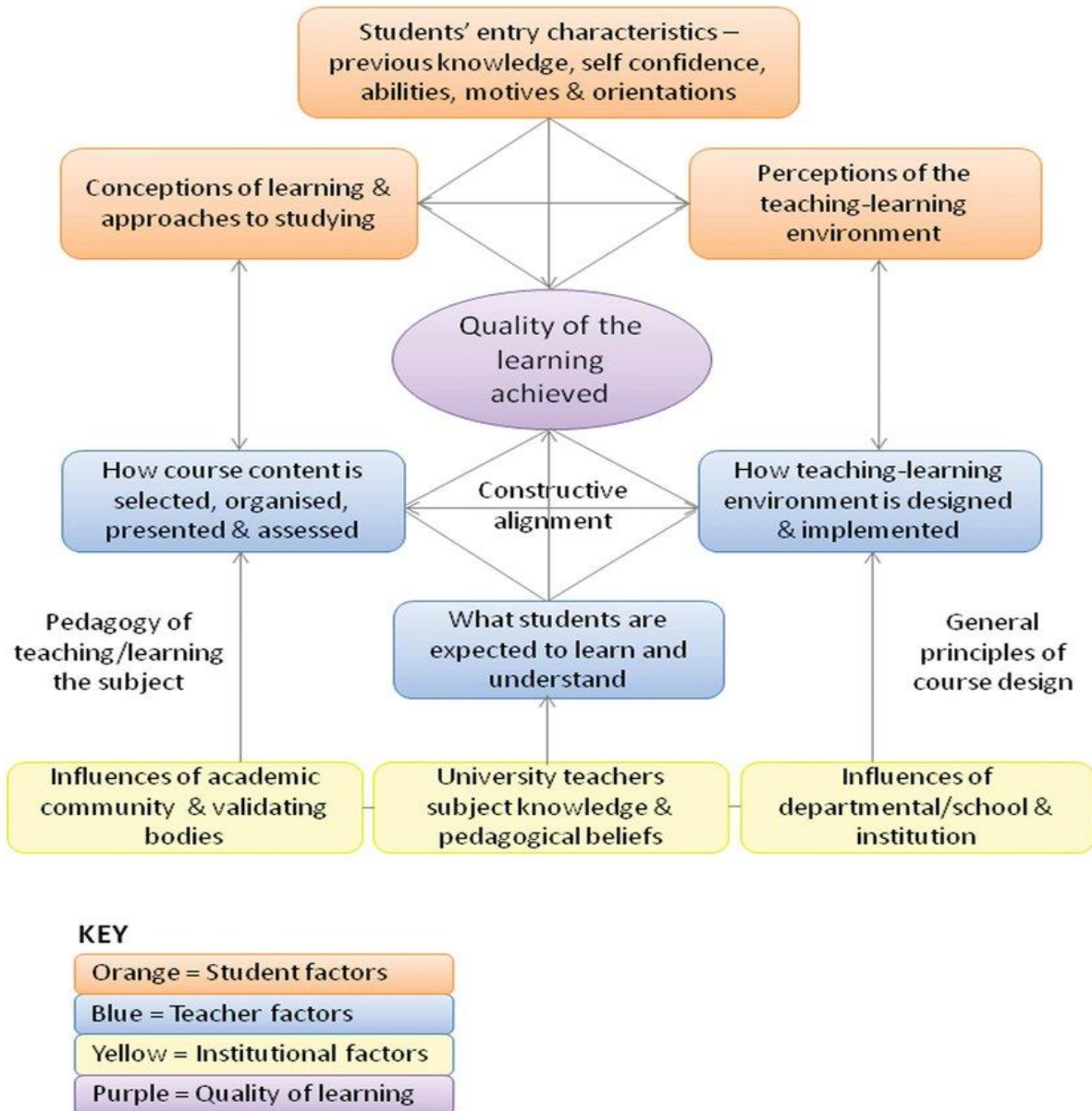
Hillman et al. (2022) examines the persistent gender inequities in academia and analyzes the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's advancement. Through a comprehensive review of literature and institutional practices, the authors identify key obstacles such as biased recruitment and promotion processes, limited access to leadership roles, and institutional cultures that privilege masculine norms. The study also explores enablers of change, including transparent policies, inclusive leadership, mentoring programs, and gender equity frameworks. Leadership is positioned as a crucial agent in driving transformation, with the authors arguing that leaders must not only model inclusive behaviors but also actively dismantle systemic inequalities. They advocate for leadership training that fosters gender awareness, accountability mechanisms, and participatory decision-making structures. The article concludes that meaningful progress requires both institutional commitment and individual agency to reshape academic cultures into more equitable, supportive environments where diversity in leadership and scholarship can thrive.

Johnson et al. (2021) speaks of the enduring disadvantage in academic progress faced by the underrepresented individuals, i.e., racial and ethnic minorities in medical academia. The authors promote the equity audits as an effective institutional instrument that should help in unveiling promotion and compensation, or representation gaps in leadership. These audits entail thorough examinations of the hiring, promotion, and retention information, allowing companies to identify the trends of inequality and take specific mechanisms of correction. The existence of transparent pathways of professional development, which are reaffirmed with strong criteria, mentorship,

and accountability, is outlined as one of the driving factors of equity. Another reason stated in the article is the necessity of the commitment of the leadership to the institutional transformation implying that diversity initiatives cannot serve as the remedy without the structural change. Among the recommendations are; the incorporate of the affected faculty in the policy making, the use of disaggregated data to make informed decisions and the development of the inclusive department climates. Altogether, the article stresses that equity as a long-lasting phenomenon needs strict evaluation as well as analytical rebuilding of academic systems to accommodate equal opportunities to all faculty.

Lester, J. (2020) explores how women faculty members in higher education navigate the complexities of work–life balance amid institutional expectations and cultural norms. Through qualitative interviews, the research reveals that women faculty often experience tension between professional demands—such as publishing, teaching, and service—and personal responsibilities, especially care giving. Institutional policies such as flexible scheduling, parental leave, and tenure clock extensions exist but are inconsistently applied or stigmatized in practice. The study categorizes patterns of institutional response into three types: supportive, symbolic, and obstructive. Supportive institutions actively promote and normalize work–life balance, while symbolic ones offer policies without meaningful implementation. Obstructive institutions maintain rigid expectations that penalize caregiving. Lester argues that achieving genuine equity requires cultural shifts that go beyond policy creation, emphasizing leadership responsibility to challenge gendered assumptions and foster inclusive environments. The article calls for systemic change to ensure that work–life integration is not treated as an individual burden but as an institutional priority.

Figure: 1



Methodology

This review followed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Scholarly databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords like “*women in higher education,*” “*academic workforce gender,*” “*gender bias in academia,*” and “*female leadership in universities.*” A total of 18 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2024 were reviewed. After screening for relevance, quality, and duplication, 42 articles were selected for detailed analysis.

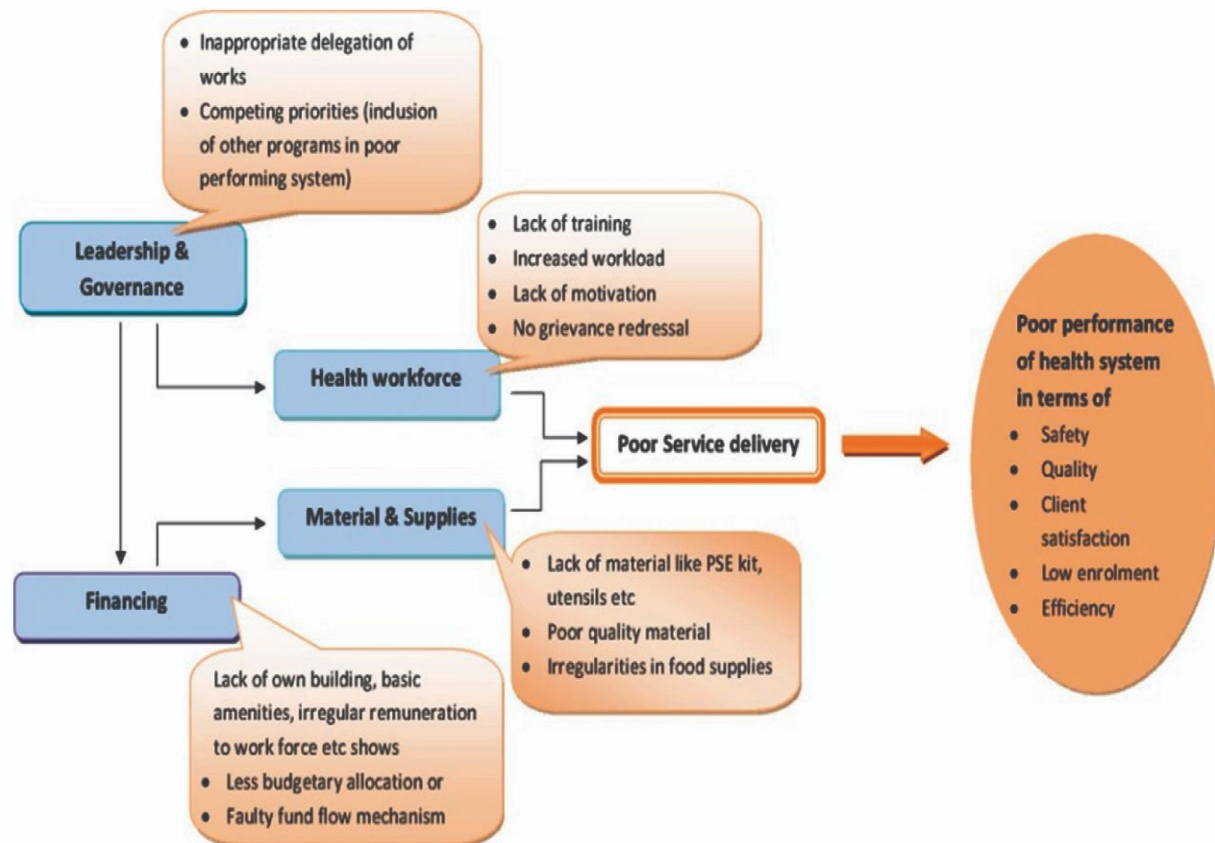
Structural and Institutional Barriers

Despite progressive policies in some universities, institutional structures continue to reproduce gender hierarchies.

1. **Recruitment and Promotion:** Recruitments and promotions are crucial in developing diversity and equity in the workplace. Nevertheless, these mechanisms are usually affected with the presence of unconscious biases, institutional walls, and organizational cultures that fail in giving opportunities to the groups, and mostly women and the minorities. Traditional qualifications and network are the key recruitment criteria in most organizations thus leaving non-traditional individuals and even experiences out. In the same vein, there can be a tendency to have visibility over merit in the promotion practice, giving a raw deal to those individuals who might lack exposure to informal mentoring or the large profile tasks. The glass ceiling effect is still noticeable in many sectors where women and the marginalized groups are poorly represented in decision-making positions regardless of equal or better performance. Such disparities can be lessened through transparent and common hiring and promotion requirements, reinforced with competence assorted training and accountability measures. Moreover, empirical reviews of trends in career progression can minimize inequalities in career advancement by factoring them in quantitative evaluations so that talent and performance rather than gender, race or external connections determines the availability of advancement opportunities.

2. **Gender Pay Gaps:** The gender pay gap persists as a major issue in global labor markets, reflecting longstanding structural inequalities. Despite improvements in education and workforce participation, women continue to earn less than men for comparable work. This pay disparity often results from a combination of factors, including occupational segregation, undervaluation of work traditionally done by women, limited access to senior roles, and discriminatory pay practices. Even in professions where women are well-represented, such as healthcare or education, men frequently occupy the higher-paying managerial roles. Additionally, career breaks due to care giving responsibilities disproportionately affect women, impacting long-term earning potential and retirement savings. Addressing gender pay gaps requires both policy and cultural change. Organizations must commit to regular pay audits, transparent salary bands, and equitable promotion practices. Government interventions, such as mandatory reporting and equal pay legislation, can further promote accountability. Ultimately, closing the gender pay gap is essential for achieving workplace fairness and economic justice.
3. **Workload Disparities:** Labor inequality is a usually unnoticed yet serious sequence of inequity in the workplace, which can demoralize individuals, output, and professional growth. Such inequities usually take place when work is inequitably allocated because of role confusion, nepotism or subliminal preferences. As an example, women and lesser-paid employees are often disproportionately offered to do administrative work or invisible labor e.g. note taking, arranging the meetings, mentoring new employees, etc., which is highly necessary yet seldom rewarded and taken into account during the performance assessment. On the contrary, visible jobs and leadership roles are more likely to be given to employees who are seen as older, aggressive, well-suited to leadership demographics. Such tendencies in the long-term restrict opportunities of people who carry the uneven workload and create resentment among the team members. To counter this, managers should keep a close watch on the distribution of work, should make positions and expectations clear as well as appreciate every form of contribution. Feedback systems and other workload monitoring tools may also assist in preserving the balance and creating an inclusive and productive working environment.

Figure: 2



Work-Life Balance and Care Responsibilities

Work-life conflict is a central theme in women's academic experiences. The culture of academia often expects total commitment and constant availability, disadvantaging those with care giving roles—predominantly women.

Maternity Leave and Tenure Clocks: Maternity leave and the tenure clock policies do have a massive impact on the career advancement of women and especially in the field of academia and research-intensive institutions. Although maternity leave is good to maintain work and life balance and health of the mother, it can also hinder the progress of the career without the tenure clocks arrested or prolonged accordingly. There are various policies that have been enacted in

various institutions, whereby women can receive extension of time in tenure evaluation in bridging the gap of parental roles. Yet these policies are not necessarily applied on a consistent basis and some women might be unwilling to avail of those policies because they fear the negative stigma of being less committed. Another problem is the absence of formal support mechanisms on the way towards re-entering the labor force (with the further complicating factor of the expectations of continuing to be as productive as before the leaves). More fair offers are automatic extension of tenure clock to all new parents, improved childcare, and special mentorship programs towards parents. Such programs have the potential to bring a culture where family obligations are not compromised (tolerated) and professional development is possible.

Part-Time and Temporary Contracts: Part-time and temporary contracts are increasingly common in today's labor markets, but they often come with significant disadvantages, especially for women and early-career professionals. Such contracts usually lack job security, health benefits, and clear promotion pathways. Employees in these roles are often excluded from professional development opportunities and decision-making processes, reinforcing a two-tier workforce. Women, particularly those with care giving responsibilities, are overrepresented in part-time roles due to limited flexible working options in full-time positions. This contributes to long-term income inequality and reduced retirement savings. Furthermore, temporary staff may face barriers to transitioning into permanent roles, despite having comparable experience and qualifications. To address these challenges, institutions should ensure equitable access to benefits, training, and career advancement opportunities regardless of contract type. Creating clearer pathways from part-time or temporary roles into stable, long-term positions can enhance inclusivity, employee retention, and overall organizational productivity.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact: The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reshaped the world of work, exposing and intensifying existing inequalities—especially for women and marginalized workers. With the shift to remote work and closure of schools and childcare facilities, care giving responsibilities disproportionately fell on women, leading many to reduce working hours or exit the workforce entirely. Academic and professional productivity, particularly among mothers, declined, which may affect performance evaluations, promotions, and future funding

opportunities. In sectors like hospitality, healthcare, and education, where women form the majority of the workforce, job losses and health risks were especially high. Additionally, early-career professionals and those on precarious contracts experienced increased uncertainty and delayed career progression. While the pandemic also catalyzed innovations in flexible work arrangements, not all workers benefited equally. To rebuild more equitable workplaces post-COVID, employers must address these setbacks with targeted support, such as extended parental leave, mental health resources, flexible scheduling, and re-entry programs for those who paused their careers.

Leadership and Representation

Women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions such as vice-chancellors, deans, and department heads. Multiple studies attribute this to:

Stereotypes Questioning Women's Leadership Abilities: Stereotypes that question women's leadership abilities remain a significant barrier to gender equality in professional environments. These stereotypes often portray women as less assertive, less strategic, or overly emotional, undermining their authority and credibility regardless of actual performance. Such biases contribute to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership roles and influence how their decisions and behaviors are judged compared to male counterparts. Women leaders frequently have to navigate a "double bind," where being assertive can result in being perceived as aggressive, while being collaborative may be seen as weak. This constant scrutiny can lead to self-doubt, stress, and reduced career satisfaction. Breaking these stereotypes requires systemic change—starting with bias training, equitable performance evaluation systems, and inclusive leadership development programs. Highlighting diverse leadership styles and celebrating successful women in power can also help shift public perceptions and foster a more supportive environment for aspiring female leaders.

Lack of Role Models and Mentors: The absence of role models and mentors for women in leadership poses a serious challenge to career progression and professional development. Without visible examples of successful women in senior positions, younger professionals may

struggle to envision a clear path forward. Mentors offer crucial guidance, advocacy, and networking opportunities, which are often less accessible to women due to historical underrepresentation in leadership. Moreover, when women do reach high-level positions, they may be overburdened with expectations to mentor others, creating unequal demands on their time. The lack of mentorship can hinder skill-building, reduce confidence, and limit access to informal decision-making networks. Institutions should therefore implement structured mentorship and sponsorship programs that prioritize diversity and inclusion. Encouraging cross-gender mentoring and creating leadership pipelines specifically for women can expand support systems and promote equitable career advancement. Increasing the visibility of female leaders can also inspire a new generation of women to pursue leadership roles.

Institutional Cultures that Privilege Aggressive, Competitive Leadership Styles
Institutional cultures that prioritize aggressive, competitive leadership styles often alienate those who adopt more collaborative or inclusive approaches—styles more commonly associated with women, though not exclusively. Traditional notions of leadership tend to reward behaviors such as dominance, self-promotion, and competitiveness, while undervaluing emotional intelligence, empathy, and team-building. This creates a narrow mold of what a "successful leader" looks like, disadvantaging individuals whose leadership strengths lie in cooperation and consensus. Women leaders may feel pressure to conform to these norms, risking backlash for appearing "too aggressive" or, conversely, being overlooked for lacking assertiveness. Such environments can also breed exclusionary practices, undermine diversity of thought, and perpetuate hierarchical power structures. To create more inclusive workplaces, organizations must redefine leadership success by valuing varied leadership styles. Encouraging inclusive decision-making, promoting team-based achievements, and integrating equity into leadership training can help dismantle these entrenched cultural biases.

Mentorship, Networks, and Support Systems

Mentorship plays a critical role in career development. Female academics benefit from:

Formal Mentorship Programs: Formal mentorship programs play a critical role in advancing equity, inclusion, and career development within organizations. These structured initiatives pair less experienced employees with seasoned professionals who can provide guidance, feedback, and advocacy. For women and underrepresented groups, mentorship helps navigate workplace challenges, build confidence, and access networks that may otherwise be difficult to reach. Unlike informal mentorships, formal programs ensure access is equitable and not dependent on personal connections or chance. Effective mentorship can also support retention by enhancing job satisfaction and clarifying career progression pathways. However, for maximum impact, mentorship programs must be carefully designed—with clearly defined goals, mentor training, accountability measures, and inclusive matching processes. Additionally, organizations should evaluate these programs regularly to ensure they are addressing the unique needs of diverse employees. By embedding mentorship into organizational culture, institutions demonstrate a tangible commitment to developing inclusive leadership pipelines and long-term employee success.

Peer Support Networks: Peer support networks are essential for fostering a sense of community, shared understanding, and mutual growth within the workplace. These networks connect individuals at similar career stages or with common experiences, offering emotional support, practical advice, and collective problem-solving. For women and marginalized groups, peer support helps reduce isolation, build confidence, and create a safe space to discuss workplace challenges that may not be openly addressed with supervisors. Unlike hierarchical mentorships, peer networks operate on reciprocity and solidarity, promoting empowerment through shared learning. They can also act as grassroots platforms for advocacy, highlighting institutional barriers and proposing inclusive policies. Peer support groups are particularly valuable in male-dominated or competitive environments, where collaborative bonds can counterbalance exclusionary cultures. Organizations should encourage and support the development of such networks by allocating resources, recognizing contributions, and integrating their insights into broader diversity and inclusion strategies. When nurtured effectively, peer networks strengthen resilience and promote organizational cohesion.

Institutional Responses and Best Practices

Several universities and policy-makers have implemented measures to advance gender equity. These include:

Gender Equity Audits and Transparent Pay Reviews: Gender equity audits and transparent pay reviews are essential tools for identifying and addressing systemic inequalities within organizations. These audits involve analyzing workforce data—such as hiring, promotion, and compensation patterns—through a gender lens to detect disparities. Transparent pay reviews ensure that employees are compensated fairly for equal work, regardless of gender, and can reveal hidden pay gaps stemming from bias, negotiation discrepancies, or outdated salary structures. Publicly sharing pay scales and criteria for advancement builds trust and accountability while discouraging discrimination. When conducted regularly, these audits not only highlight current inequalities but also inform corrective actions and long-term equity strategies. Moreover, involving external reviewers or third-party auditors can enhance objectivity and credibility. By institutionalizing these practices, organizations send a strong message about their commitment to fairness, helping to attract and retain diverse talent and fostering a workplace culture rooted in equity, transparency, and continuous improvement.

Leadership Training Programs: Leadership training programs are a vital strategy for cultivating inclusive, diverse, and competent leaders across all levels of an organization. When designed with a gender equity lens, these programs can help close representation gaps by equipping women and underrepresented groups with the skills, confidence, and networks necessary for leadership roles. Effective programs go beyond technical training to include modules on strategic thinking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and personal branding—while also addressing gender bias and workplace dynamics. Sponsorship and access to high-visibility projects should also be integrated into these initiatives to support real-world application and advancement opportunities. Leadership development programs that include mentorship, peer collaboration, and scenario-based learning empower participants to challenge stereotypes and navigate complex organizational structures. For long-term impact, organizations must measure the outcomes of

such training, track the career trajectories of participants, and align leadership development with broader diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

Flexible Work Policies: Flexible work policies have become a cornerstone of inclusive and modern workplace practices, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These policies—which include options like remote work, flexible hours, job-sharing, and compressed workweeks—help employees balance professional responsibilities with personal and caregiving obligations. For women, who often shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic duties, flexible arrangements can significantly improve work-life balance, reduce burnout, and increase retention. Importantly, flexible work should be available across all roles and levels without stigma or career penalties. When implemented equitably, these policies also promote productivity, well-being, and organizational loyalty. Employers must ensure that flexibility is not used to justify reduced opportunities or visibility for remote workers. To succeed, clear guidelines, performance metrics, and supportive management are essential. Ultimately, flexible work policies represent a powerful tool for fostering gender equity, enabling employees to thrive in both their personal and professional lives.

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