# Women's Struggle in the Workplace: A Review on Understanding and Addressing the Challenges

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**Abstract:** This research review paper explores the challenges faced by women employees in the workplace, which have been categorized into four main areas: organisational, technical, psychological, and personal challenges. The paper highlights the need for organisations to address these challenges by implementing a multifaceted approach. This approach involves creating a supportive and inclusive work environment, providing training and development opportunities to enhance skills, promoting work-life balance, and overall well-being of women employees. The paper emphasizes that addressing these challenges is essential for promoting gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace and for creating a more equitable and productive work environment.

**Keywords:** Women Employees, Inequality, Employee Discrimination, Challenges, Workplace

**JEL Classification Number:** J700, J710

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been progress in the work culture towards achieving gender equality, with many organisations recognizing the importance of diversity (Khan et al., 2019; Gross-Gołacka et al., 2022; Altunbas et al., 2022), inclusion (Salter and Migliaccio, 2019; Prasad, 2022; Santuzzi et al., 2022; Pal et al., 2022), and equity in the workplace (Noronha et al., 2022) (Ayyala et al., 2022). Companies are now prioritizing initiatives that promote gender equality, such as pay transparency (Stofberg et al., 2022), diversity and inclusion training, and family-friendly policies (Chou and Cheung, 2013) and flexible working arrangements (Angelici and Profeta, 2020; Barry et al., 2022). Many organisations are also setting targets and tracking progress towards closing the gender pay gap and increasing the representation of women in leadership positions (Rubery et al., 2005; Cohen and Kiran, 2020; Gottlieb and Jagsi, 2021; Pandit et al., 2022).

However, despite this progress, gender inequality remains a persistent issue in many workplaces that impacts the physical and psychological health of women (Dhatt et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2022; Cortis et al., 2022). The gender pay gap, for example, continues to be a significant problem, with women earning less than men on average in most countries around the world. Women also continue to face barriers to career advancement, with many industries still experiencing a "glass ceiling" phenomenon, where women are unable to reach the top of the corporate ladder due to various barriers (Van Veelen and Derks 2022). With this context in mind, the purpose of this research is to inquire into the difficulties encountered by women at workplace and the ways in which these difficulties may be surmounted.

## 2. Challenges faced by the Women in Workplace

Gender inequality has significant consequences for women in the workplace creating numerous challenges that impact their social (Koengkan et al., 2022), economic (Elveren et al., 2022), and personal well-being (Couch et al., 2022).  The challenges faced by the women are categorized into Organisational challenges, technical challenges, psychological challenges and personal or home related challenges (Rani and Prathiba, 2021). Some of the most significant issues facing women are as follows.

### 2.1. Organisational Challenges

Organisational challenges refer to the systemic barriers that prevent women from achieving equality in the workplace, including issues such Pay inequality, Lack of career advancement opportunities, Limited representation in leadership positions, Workplace discrimination and harassment and Lack of flexibility and support for work-life balance.

  i.   **Pay inequality:** Women earn less than men on average in most countries around the world, with the gender pay gap being widest for women of colour and those in low-paying jobs (Strah et al., 2022). According to the findings of a study, women earn between 5 and 45 percent less than their male colleagues (Wiler et al., 2022). The research also reveals that companies pay much less remuneration when they replace a male CEO with a female CEO (Chen et al., 2022).

  ii.  **Lack of Career advancement opportunities:** Women face barriers to career advancement in many industries, often referred to as the "glass ceiling" (Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). This is due to systemic barriers such as discrimination (Abeer et al., 2019), bias (Espinosa and Ferreira, 2022), and lack of mentorship (Waqar et al., 2019) and networking opportunities (Cohen et al., 2020)., which can have a significant impact on women's earning potential and long-term career prospects.

iii. **Limited representation in leadership positions:** Women are often underrepresented in executive and managerial roles, particularly in male-dominated industries (Dhatt et al., 2017; Wiler et al., 2022;). This lack of representation limits women's ability to influence decision-making and perpetuates gender bias in the workplace.

iv. **Work discrimination and harassment:** Women continue to experience harassment and work discrimination (Rahman, 2019) in the workplace, with sexual harassment being a pervasive problem (Siuta and Bergman, 2019; Cortina and Areguin, 2021; Pei et al., 2022). This not only creates a hostile work environment for women but also has a significant impact on their mental health (Adams et al., 2019) and career outcomes (Vargas et al., 2020) and, as well as their job satisfaction (Maghraby et al., 2020; Alrawadieh et al., 2022).

v. **Lack of flexibility in job:** Lack of flexibility in the workplace is a significant organisational challenge that disproportionately affects women employees. Women often have caregiving responsibilities that require them to balance work and family demands. However, many workplaces are designed with a traditional 9-to-5 workday and inflexible schedules, which can make it challenging for women to meet their caregiving responsibilities while also meeting their job expectations. This lack of flexibility can result in women leaving the workforce or not advancing in their careers, perpetuating gender inequality. Those organisations promising to recruit the women employees after the maternity leave often expect the women employees to resign and seek another employment (Nowak et al., 2013).

vi. **Lack of support for work-life balance:** Women often face competing demands between work and personal responsibilities, such as caregiving or household duties, and may find it difficult to balance these demands with their job responsibilities (Nowak, 2013; Bashir and Khan, 2022)

## 2.2.Technical Challenges

Technical challenges refer to the systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing and advancing in technical fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These challenges can include Gender bias in performance evaluations, Lack of training and development opportunities, Underrepresentation in technical roles and Barriers to entering and succeeding in STEM fields.

i. **Gender bias in performance evaluations:** Gender bias in performance evaluation refers to the systematic disadvantage faced by women employees in the evaluation and assessment of their job performance. Studies have shown that women are often evaluated on different criteria than men and receive lower

ratings, even when their performance is objectively equivalent to their male colleagues (Rivera and Tilcsik, 2019; Gerull et al., 2019; Orgad and Belinkov, 2022). Factors that contribute to gender bias in performance evaluation, including unconscious biases (Gerull et al., 2019) held by managers and evaluators and gender stereotypes (Ramos et al., 2022) that impact the expectations and perceptions of women employees.

ii. **Lack of training and development opportunities:** Lack of training and development opportunities for women refers to the systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing the same professional development opportunities as their male colleagues (Milner, S. and Gregory, A. (2022). The lack of training and development opportunities for women can have a significant impact on their career advancement, job satisfaction, and overall success (Karyotaki et al., 2022).

iii. **Underrepresentation of women in technical roles:** It refers to the systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing and advancing in technical fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Moser and Branscombe, 2022; Schmader, 2023). There are several factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in technical roles, including stereotypes and biases (Thébaud and Charles, 2018) that lead to gender segregation in the fields.

## 2.3. Psychological challenges

Psychological challenges refer to the negative impact that gender stereotypes, discrimination, and bias can have on the mental health and wellbeing of women in the workplace. These challenges include Impostor syndrome, Stereotyping and unconscious bias, Emotional exhaustion and burnout, Fear of reprisal for speaking out about discrimination.

i. **Imposter syndrome:** Impostor syndrome is a psychological phenomenon in which individuals doubt their abilities and feel like they are frauds or do not deserve their success (Tulshyan and Burey, 2021). Studies report that Impostor syndrome is a common experience for many women in the workplace, who may face stereotypes, biases, and discrimination that make it difficult for them to recognize their achievements and feel confident in their abilities (Lee and Morfitt, 2020; Handforth, 2022). Women employees who experience impostor syndrome may feel like they do not belong in their positions, worry that they are not good enough, or feel like they are impostors who are deceiving others (Millward, 2006). When given leadership roles, women adopted a consensual approach to accepting, first obtaining approval from their families (Dhatt et al., 2017). The Imposter syndrome is linked with higher levels of burnout, suicidal thoughts and lower job performance (Shanafelt et al., 2022).

ii.   **Stereotyping and unconscious bias:** Stereotyping and unconscious bias are two major challenges that women employees face in the workplace (Gauci et al., 2022; Noronha et al., 2022). It can lead to discriminatory practices against women, such as assuming that women are not interested in leadership positions or paying women less than men for the same work. Both stereotyping and unconscious bias can have a negative impact on women employees, making it harder for them to advance in their careers, receive fair compensation, and be treated with respect and dignity (Gatrell and Cooper, 2007).

iii.  **Emotional exhaustion and burnout:** Emotional exhaustion is a key component of burnout (Seidler et al., 2014). Burnout leads to poorer job quality and harm to mental health (Jiménez-Ortiz et al., 2019). Burnout is caused primarily by unjust treatment at work, an overwhelming work burden, a lack of job definition, a lack of dialogue and support from supervisors, and unnecessary time pressure (Maslach et al., 1997). Emotional exhaustion and burnout are common issues faced by women employees, particularly those in high-stress and demanding work environments (Hwang et al., 2021; Aldossari and Chaudhry, 2021; Riyono and Rezki, 2022).

iv.   **Fear of reprisal for speaking out about discrimination:** Fear of reprisal is a common concern for women employees who experience discrimination in the workplace. Many women may feel that speaking out about discrimination could lead to negative consequences, such as retaliation, loss of employment, or damage to their professional reputation (Lee and Yu, 2020). The consequences of this fear can be significant, as it may prevent women from speaking out about discriminatory practices or seeking support from their employer or colleagues.

## 2.4. Personal challenges

Personal challenges refer to the barriers that women face in balancing their personal and professional responsibilities. Women are often expected to manage household and caregiving responsibilities in addition to their work responsibilities, which can result in feelings of stress and burnout. Societal expectations around gender roles, lack of access to affordable childcare, Difficulty in pursuing personal interests are some of the personal challenges.

i.    **Unpaid caregiving responsibilities:** Women are more likely than men to take on unpaid caregiving responsibilities, such as caring for children, elderly relatives, or those with disabilities. This can impact their ability to participate fully in the workforce and limits their earning potential (Dhatt et al., 2017).

ii.   **Societal expectations around gender roles:** Women are often expected to fulfil traditional gender roles (Eisend, 2019), such as being caregivers and prioritizing family responsibilities over their careers (Farré, 2022). These expectations are

deeply ingrained in cultural and societal norms, making it difficult for women to challenge them without facing negative consequences. Women may feel pressured to conform to these gender roles in order to be seen as "successful" or "acceptable" in the workplace, even if it means sacrificing their own needs and goals.

iii. **Lack of access to affordable childcare:** Lack of access to affordable childcare can make it difficult for women to balance their work and family responsibilities (Jackson, 2022). Many women have to juggle their careers with the responsibility of taking care of their children, and this can become a major hurdle when they don't have access to affordable childcare options (Petts, 2021). The high cost of childcare can make it financially unfeasible for some women to continue working, which can lead to career interruptions, lower wages, and a loss of benefits. Additionally, lack of availability of quality childcare services can put additional emotional and mental strain on working mothers.

Of course, there may be other challenges faced by women that don't fit neatly into these categories, and some challenges may fall into multiple categories.

## 3. Suggestions

Addressing the challenges faced by women in the workplace requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes diversity, inclusion, and equity in the workplace. This section discusses the possible solutions for the challenges faced by the women employees:

i. Addressing the challenge in terms of glass ceiling requires proactive efforts to promote gender diversity in leadership positions (Schooley, 2019), including setting targets, providing training and development opportunities, and creating supportive cultures ((Nowak et al., 2013) that empower women to advance in their careers. Increasing representation of women in leadership positions is not only essential for achieving gender equality but also for driving innovation and enhancing organisational performance (Dhatt et al., 2017).

ii. Flexibility in the workplace can be attained by creating policies and practices that support work-life balance and caregiving responsibilities (Chung et al., 2018). Examples of such policies could include flexible scheduling options and teleworking (Chung et al., 2018; Skinner and Pocock, 2011), remote work opportunities, part-time work (Yerkes, 2009), on-site childcare (Nowak et al., 2013), and paid parental leave (Bergemann and Riphahn, 2023).

iii. Organisations can help address the lack of work-life balance issues by creating policies and practices that support work-life balance for their employees (Langer et al., 2015).

iv.     Addressing technical challenges requires creating more inclusive and equitable environments that empower women to pursue and succeed in technical fields (Johnson, 2022).

v.      Additionally, addressing personal challenges requires creating cultures that value and respect the diverse personal experiences and responsibilities of women employees (Rosa, 2022).

**vi.**    To address gender bias in performance evaluation, organisations can implement training and education programs that raise awareness of unconscious biases and stereotypes (Sarkar, 2022; Matiba and Vaginga, 2022).

## 4. Conclusion

While there has been progress towards achieving gender equality in the workplace, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed. Organisations must continue to prioritize diversity, inclusion, and equity in their policies and practices, and work towards eradicating the systemic barriers that continue to perpetuate gender inequality.

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