Feminist Evaluation of Workplace Policies: Promoting Gender Equality in Pakistani Organizations

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Abstract: With the aim of fostering gender equality and inclusivity in organizational settings, an exploration of workplace policies becomes imperative. This quantitative inquiry takes on the task of lensing corporate policies in Pakistan from a feminist perspective, with a sample of 200 women from different sectors. Pakistan's abysmal state of gender inequality is highlighted by its rank of 155th out of 162 countries in the Gender Development Index (GDI), revealing significant disparities. Maternity leave policies are decreed as dissatisfactory (21.3%) and mediocre (23.9%), calling for more supportive and inclusive measures with negative impacts on work-life balance (33.6%) and career trajectory (47.4%). Salary structures are marked by discontent (28.9% dissatisfied, 22.0% very dissatisfied), representing potentially egregious gender-based disparities. Beliefs in gender parity for promotions and salary increases are minuscule (44.2% disagreement). Transparency issues loom large (54.2% communication, 48.2% promotion criteria), suggesting the dire need for improved organizational communication. Harassment policies breed mixed perceptions and are deemed ineffective (35.9%). The findings call for organizational intervention and outline key strategies for the ecosystem of work in Pakistan to forge a more gender-equitable workplace.

Introduction

Pakistan ranks 155th out of 162 on the Gender Development Index (GDI), demonstrating gender imbalance. Despite evolving worklife regulations in Pakistan, gender inequalities persist due to traditional conventions and inclusivity attempts. Women still confront gender wage discrepancy, leadership vacuum, and maternity discrimination notwithstanding legislative frameworks. Illiteracy, low education, and vocational incompetence contribute to the Pakistani female wage gap (Yasin et al., 2010). The education industry struggles with women's underrepresentation in management (Irum et al., 2022). Pakistani higher education institutions face widespread workplace incivility, including discrimination, abuse, and

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harassment, which goes unreported (Anwaar et al., 2022). Pakistani female university teachers often balance working and caring for their children, and while maternity leave is available, paternity leave may be inadequate or non-existent, perpetuating traditional gender roles and compounding these challenges. PJE, 2023).

In 2013, more than 80% of Pakistani universities did not implement the 2010 protection against harassment of women at work act (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2016). Culture and the stigma of discussing gender issues contribute to workplace incivility, and anti-harassment policies are likely to persist because they lack teeth.

Feminist evaluation of policies is essential for gender equality and inclusivity. This technique incorporates several crucial components for evaluating Pakistani workplace policies. Feminist analysis acknowledges intersectionality—gender overlaps with other social identities (Bose, 2012). Policies should acknowledge varied experiences and challenges. Thus, intersectionality improves policy effectiveness and inclusivity.

Feminist viewpoints highlight underlying biases in policies, such as language or assumptions, making policy evaluations more complete. Exposing these prejudices may affect policies, enhancing equity and inclusion. Feminist viewpoints also emphasize the necessity to build varied workplace cultures that meet male and female demands (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). This promotes inclusivity and creates a more gender-balanced workplace. Feminist policy evaluation also reveals power disparities, which leads to policies that question and abolish gender-based hierarchies (Bose, 2012). This is needed to address workplace and social power relations. This method also recognises cultural variations, making policies effective and culturally sensitive, which is necessary for cultural acceptance and implementation of gender equality programs (Korpi, 2000). This is crucial in varied cultures like Pakistan.

This quantitative analysis addresses the feminist subject of Pakistan's workplace policies. With a broad sample of 200 women, gender dynamics in maternity leave, income, promotion, and workplace harassment regulations are examined. Dissatisfaction or neutrality in the maternity leave experience suggests additional helpful and inclusive actions. Different perceptions of wage structures and promotion criteria suggest gender differences. The study uses quantitative and qualitative data to emphasize the need for organizational interventions to reduce gender disparities and provides a solid foundation for gender-equitable workplaces in Pakistan.

Research Questions
1. To what extent are female employees in Pakistani organizations satisfied with the current maternity leave policies, and what factors contribute to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction?
2. How do perceptions of workplace gender dynamics impact the career trajectories and work-life balance of female employees in Pakistan, particularly during and after maternity leave?
3. What is the prevalence of harassment among female employees in Pakistani workplaces, and to what extent do existing anti-harassment measures contribute to creating a safe and inclusive work environment?

Research Objectives.
1. Assess female employees' satisfaction with pregnancy leave policies in Pakistani enterprises and identify factors affecting satisfaction.
2. To examine how organizational policies and societal norms affect Pakistani women employees' professional paths and work-life balance, particularly during and after maternity leave.
3. Determine the frequency of harassment experienced by Pakistani women in the workplace and the effectiveness of current anti-harassment measures in promoting a safe and welcoming workplace, focusing on reporting and support barriers.

Workplace Laws and Policies in Pakistan
Pakistan has comprehensive workplace policies to protect workers and create a safe and productive workplace. These policies cover working hours, leave, minimum wage, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, health and safety, freedom of association, and dispute resolution (Ali et al., 2021). For the standard workweek and leave entitlement, Pakistan requires 48 hours with no more than 9 hours per day, including breaks. Ramadan reduces work hours to 6, helping employees meet deadlines and overcome challenges.

Employees are entitled to annual, sick, and maternity leave to rest and recover from the workweek and attend to medical emergencies (Ali et al., 2021). Minimum wage and benefits laws in Pakistan ensure a minimum standard of living for workers and their families. Health insurance, provident funds, and transportation allowances are offered by employers to improve employee welfare and work harmony (Hayat & Afshari, 2020). Pakistan's labor laws prohibit gender, religion, age, and ethnicity discrimination, creating a fair workplace with equal recruitment, promotion, and training opportunities. Diverse and inclusive workplaces boost creativity and innovation (Fida, 2022). Pakistan's Factories Act of 1934 and Mines Act of 1923 require employers to provide safety measures at their own expense. Ventilators, goggles, gloves, hovers, and safety belts are used when handling hazardous materials. Pakistani workers' safety record is much better than a decade ago because the government conducts checks and inspections to protect workers from injury and death (Ahmed et al., 2023). The Pakistani constitution allows workers to form unions and collectively bargain for better working conditions. These unions facilitate communication between large groups of workers and management, maintaining the power balance between employers and labor (Chaudhry et al., 2017).

Finally, Pakistan's 1969 Industrial Relations Ordinance resolves collective disputes and protects bail-bonds workers. The definition of inductance, conciliation, and the ability to bring labor disputes resonates with the collective rationale and prolongs the dispute resolution process (Hayat et al., 2019). Employers can maintain a healthy and harmonious work environment that is safe and productive for employees and successful for the company by following Pakistani labor laws.

Literature Review
Workplace policies in Pakistan have had a tumultuous landscape reflecting traditional norms and recent inclusivity efforts, particularly concerning gender dynamics. Gender disparities persist despite legal frameworks, evident in challenges such as the gender wage gap, the underrepresentation of women in

leadership roles, and biases related to maternity. Factors contributing to the gender wage discrimination in Pakistan include illiteracy, low education levels, and the lack of vocational skills (Yasin et al., 2010). Educational management is a primary challenge related to the underrepresentation of women in the education sector (Irum et al., 2022). Workplace incivility, to include discrimination, bullying, and harassment, is common within higher educational institutes in Pakistan and more often than not, it goes unreported (Anwaar et al., 2022).

Limited worklife balance, with inflexible working hours, disproportionately affects women in Pakistan, who must balance dual roles as professionals and caregivers. Maternity leave, often provided, may also counter inadequate or nonexistent paternity leave, thereby perpetuating traditional gender roles. Consequently, these impact the empowerment of female university teachers in Pakistan (PJE, 2023). Harassment and discrimination continue to pervade the workplace in Pakistan. As of 2013, over 80% of universities in Pakistan were not compliant with the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) on common Pakistani universities and organizations failing to implement the policy (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2016). Reporting harassment may be inhibited by cultural concerns and stigmas associated with the public participation in matters related to gender, and established anti-harassment policies may not have robust enforcement mechanisms, leaving employees with little protection.

Evaluating policies through a feminist perspective becomes fundamental for achieving gender equality and inclusivity in a variety of contexts, including workplace policies in countries such as Pakistan. It encompasses several key components that are integral to comprehensive policy evaluations. When subjected to a feminist analysis, policies are evaluated in recognition of the concept of intersectionality, which asserts that gender is interconnected with other social identities (Bose, 2012). This ensures that a considered policy includes diverse experiences and challenges, leading to more inclusive and more effective outcomes. A feminist lens also has the capacity to reveal implicit biases within policies, to include gendered language or assumptions, thereby enabling more exhaustive evaluations (Bustelo, 2003). By shedding light on these, policies can be revised to be more equitable and inclusive.

In addition, feminist perspectives also recognize creating environments that accommodate various needs, forging a working environment that supports both men and women (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). This fosters inclusivity and contributes to the larger project of crafting an atmosphere of support and equity for professionals. Finally, by subjecting policies to a feminist framework, they can expose power imbalances, enabling policies to contest and dismantle systemic gender-based hierarchies (Bose, 2012). This is needed in order to address how power operates within workplaces and how it functions within broader society.To conclude, a feminist perspective encompasses a recognition of cultural nuances, which ensures that policies are not only effective, but also culturally sensitive, thereby ensuring their viability for acceptance and implementation (Korpi, 2000). This is especially important in the cultural context of a country like Pakistan, where cultural sensitivity is essential to foster successful implementation of gender equality policies.

Research Gap

Quantitative feminist research on workplace policies in Pakistan is scarce despite the growing body of literature. Qualitative studies have amplified women's work experiences, but few quantitative studies,

especially feminist ones, exist. Quantitative data can provide a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics, but the literature is mostly qualitative. The qualitative research on workplace incivility (Anwaar et al., 2022) and women's educational management challenges (Irum, 2022) provides valuable insights. But the quantitative dimension is mostly unexplored. Quantitative research is needed to track gender-based disparities and support qualitative research.

The lack of feminist quantitative research in Pakistan is notable. This absence hinders understanding how gender affects pregnancy leave, salaries, promotions, and workplace harassment policies. Our exhaustive quantitative study with 200 diverse female participants aims to close this gap. We aim to provide a holistic and data-driven analysis of Pakistani workplace policies by using a feminist lens. This fills a gap in the literature and enriches the academic narrative on gender dynamics in Pakistani organizations.

Research Methodology

The unique nature of this research required an exclusively quantitative approach to examine the perceptions and experiences of female employees within Pakistani organizations, pertaining to maternity leave policies, gender dynamics within the workplace, and the efficacy of antiharassment measures in place within their organizations. The study mandated using a structured questionnaire survey to elicit data and a specific emphasis was placed on the efficiency and statistical rigor associated with quantitative methods.

Population and Sampling

This research focused on a population of 200 female employees from a variety of sectors across Pakistan. The sectors were as diverse as possible with the intention to observe as much variance as possible. The target population was reached using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across sectors. The survey was distributed via organizational networks, social media, and email lists. Respondents were solicited based on the willingness of their organizations to distribute the survey.

Data Collection

Quantitative data to measure satisfaction with maternity leave policies, perceptions of gender dynamics within the workplace, and instances of harassment were elicited using the structured online survey. The survey was comprised entirely of closed-ended questions to maintain a standardized and efficient data collection process. All necessary data was gathered and entered into a statistical software application.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using software for statistical applications. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were run to summarize key survey responses.

Discussion and Analysis

A thorough demographic profile of the study's participants shows their faces and distribution. The study's 200 participants were mostly women, reflecting its focus on gender views in Pakistani workplace policies. This study amplifies women's views and experiences, who have traditionally faced specific hurdles and inequities in professional realms, by excluding male and other gender categories. A gender-centric

approach ensures a detailed examination of workplace rules from the perspective of marginalized or underrepresented groups in decision-making. The age distribution showed that the study included professionals at all stages. The largest cohort, 35.2% of the participants, was 2535, indicating that early to midcareer professionals are likely to be actively engaged with workplace policies and grappling with career advancement, work-life balance, and familial planning. Additionally, 14.4% of participants aged 56 and above provide the perspective of seasoned workers who may have witnessed workplace dynamic shifts over time.

Figure 1

Age of participants
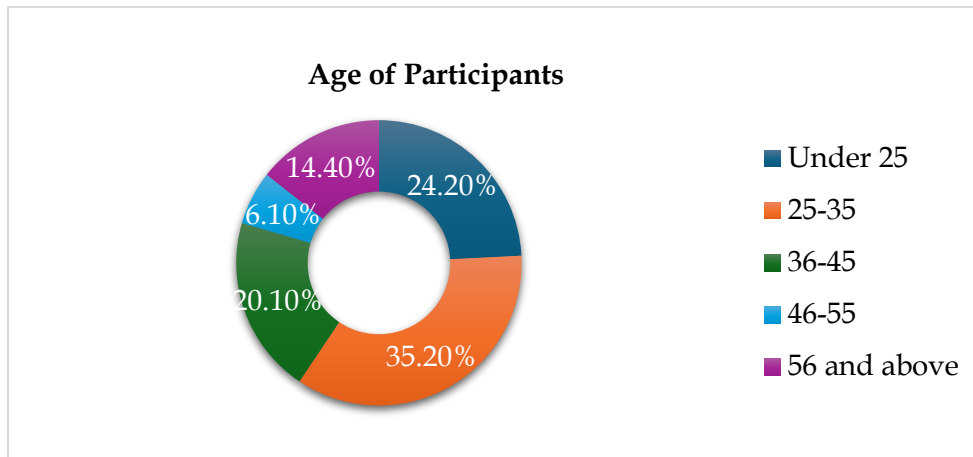
In organizational contexts, the study includes a diverse cross-section of individuals from different sectors. Most participants are private (43.5%), followed by public (46.2%) and non-profit (10.3%). The diversity was necessary to investigate workplace regulations in different sectors, as private and public sector policy dynamics can differ. Our sample was diversified by including non-profit organizations, which have different difficulties and priorities than profit-driven organizations focusing on shareholder value.93 This multisectoral strategy improves our data' applicability and generalizability and helps us understand gendered dynamics in varied Pakistani workplaces.

Figure 2

Organization type of participants
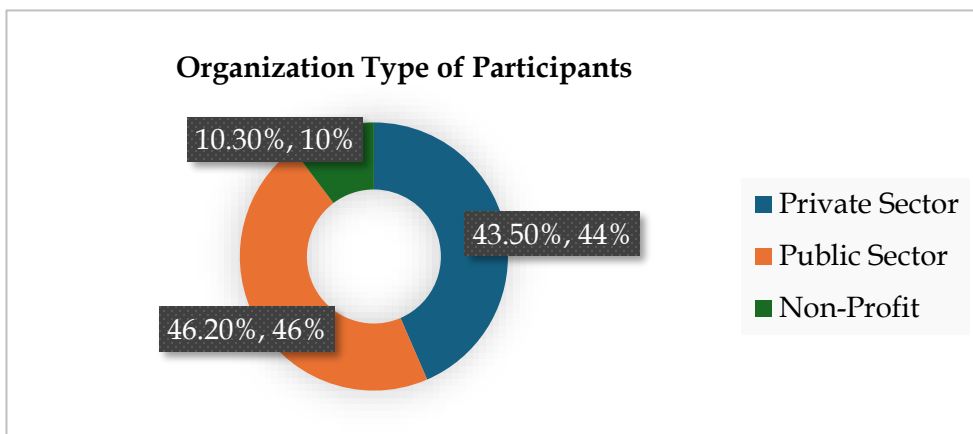
Maternity Leave Policy Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the Maternity Leave policy in Pakistani organizations is not as positive as it seems. The majority of respondents are neutral (23.9%), dissatisfied (21.3%), and very dissatisfied (20.3%), which is alarming. These feelings may be caused by insufficient leave duration, benefits gaps, etc. A significant neutral response is all the more reason to seek feedback and investigate the pain points causing such high ambivalence (Anwaar et al., 2022). The literature suggests that a supportive maternity leave policy includes communication, inclusiveness, and transparency (Bose, 2012; Bustelo, 2003). Pakistani organizations should assess their maternity leave policies to align them with international maternal and child health best practices to address the issues raised in these responses (Irum et al., 2022). It may be necessary to clarify benefits, leave duration, and support during and after return. To improve such policies, employees, and leadership should work together (PJE, 2023). This could lead to a more supportive environment in Pakistan where female workers are seen as supported and treated fairly.

Figure 3

Maternity Leave Satisfaction
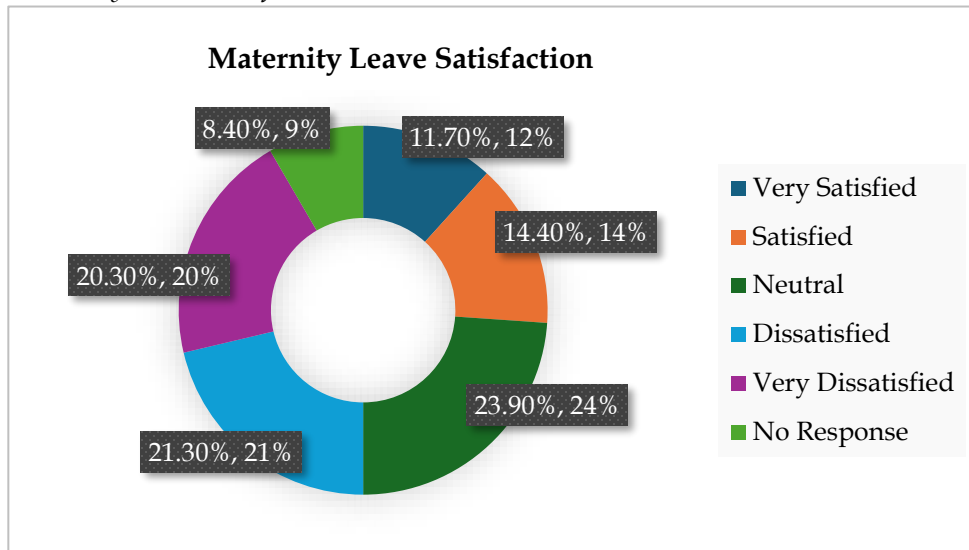
Duration of Maternity Leave

Maternity leave duration is important in policy evaluation, as 32.2% of respondents reported under 12 weeks. As the literature emphasizes the importance of supportive and inclusive maternity leave provisions, this figure raises concerns about the adequacy of leave duration to adequately support new mothers (Irum et al., 2022).

The 23.2% 'No Response' category suggests a lack of clarity or awareness of organizational maternity leave policies. This point highlights the need for strong communication strategies to inform employees of their support options during maternity leave. Organizations should help maternity leave policies align with international best practices for maternal and child health by initiating transparent communication and awareness campaigns that create a more aware and supportive environment for new mothers.

Figure 4

Duration of maternity leave

Duration of Maternity Leave

- Less than 12 weeks — 32%
- 12-16 weeks — 25%
- 17-20 weeks — 11%
- More than 20 weeks — 9%
- No Response — 23%
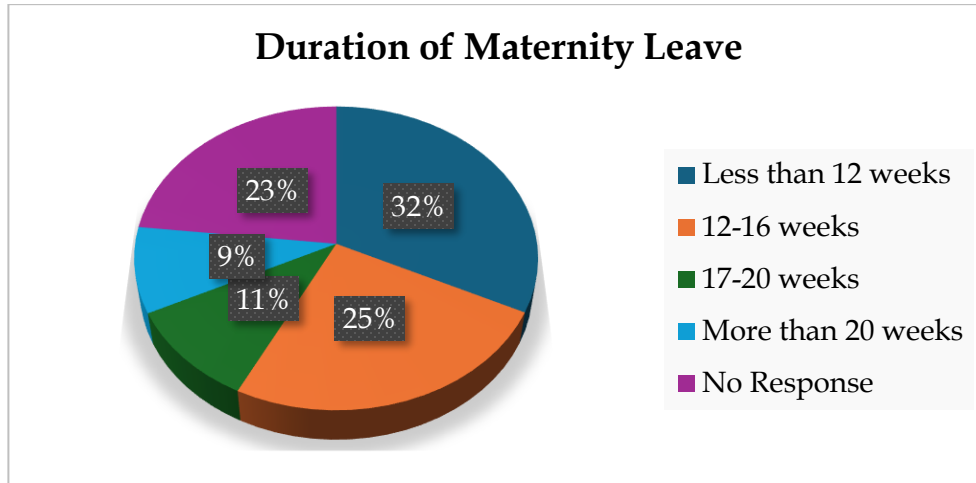
Awareness of Benefits

The awareness of benefits during maternity leave emerges as a critical factor in policy effectiveness, with 58% of respondents indicating awareness. However, the remaining 42% without awareness underscore the need for organizations to strengthen communication strategies. This suggests the general literature advocating for clear and transparent communication of policies and benefits (Bose, 2012) is essential. This gap in awareness may well account for dissatisfaction or neutrality in satisfaction level responses, thus warranting attention to enhance overall employee satisfaction and well-being during maternity leave. The knowledge dimension from inclusive communication strategies to support employees during maternity leave (Bustelo, 2003) offers guidance to organizations. Proactively communicating and highlighting appreciation for the benefits during maternity leave is an avenue to enhancing understanding, complementing the lived experience, and contributing to a supportive and informed environment for new Pakistani mothers in organizations.

Figure 5

Awareness of maternity benefits

Awareness of Maternity Benefits

- Yes — 58%, 58%
- No — 42%, 42%
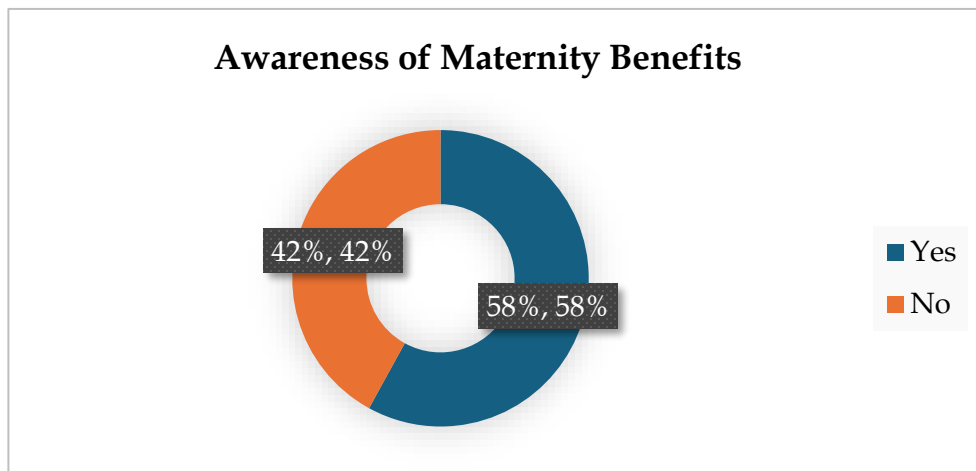
Impact on Work-Life Balance and Career Trajectory

The findings show that maternity leave has complex effects on work-life balance and career paths. Flexible and facilitative policies that help employees balance work and life are highlighted by 33.7% of positive work-life balance responses (Bose, 2012). However, 33.6% of respondents reported a negative impact on work-life balance, highlighting the need for additional organizational support and the complexity of maternity leave literature (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013).

About half of the sample (47.4%) thought it would hurt their careers. Their concerns, consistent with the literature that women may find it difficult to return to their organizational roles post-maternity (Bose, 2012), highlight the need for organizational interventions and professional development resources during and after maternity leave. This supports the literature's calls for more comprehensive workplace support for women (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Addressing these issues can help Pakistani companies support and include women.

Figure 6

Awareness of maternity benefits

Impact on WorkLife Balance

- Positively
- Neutral
- Negatively
- No Response
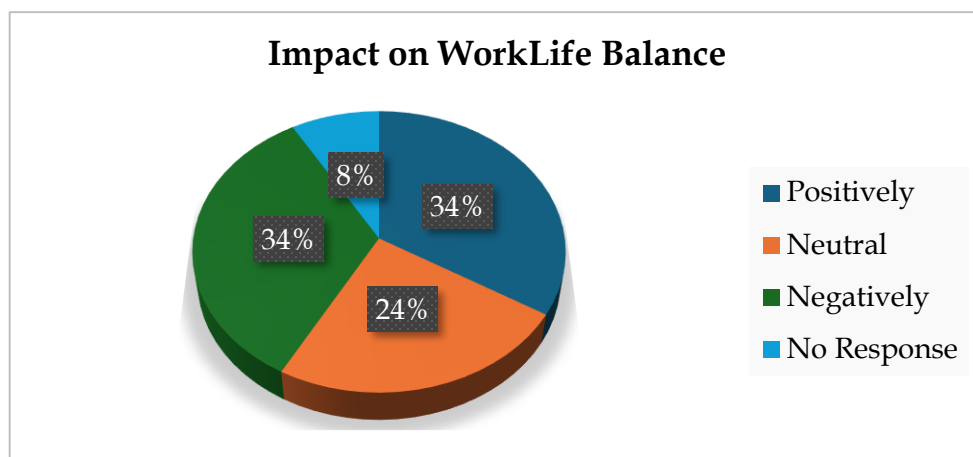
Figure 7

Awareness of maternity benefits

Impact on Career Trajectory

- Positive Impact
- No Significant Impact
- Negative Impact
- No Response
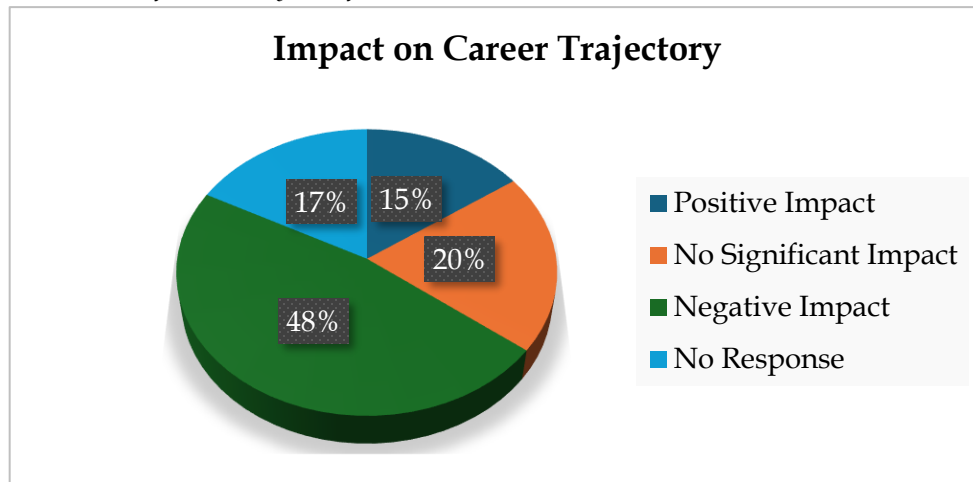
Satisfaction with Salary Structures

Organizational perceptions of salary structure fairness align with literature on employee satisfaction. A notable 25.4% reported satisfaction, but the large "Dissatisfied" (28.9%) and "Very Dissatisfied" (22.0%) categories encourage organizations to critically examine salary disparities (Korpi, 2000). These data emphasize the importance of open dialogue with employees to identify their concerns, as per scholarly directions, to facilitate transparent salary structure communication for a more equitable and satisfying work environment (Bustelo, 2003).

Figure 8

Salary structure satisfaction
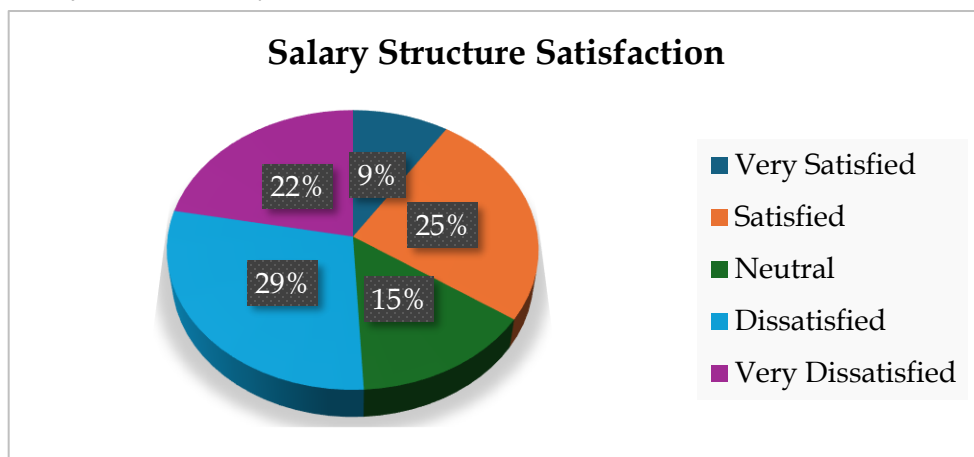
Belief in Gender Parity in Promotions

Both examples are instructive for future research. The overall pattern of gender and promotion and salary increase beliefs is most concerning. The statement was disagreed with by 44.2% and strongly by 13.8%. Bose (2012) urges organizations to examine their promotion process and take gender-based disparities seriously, and our results support this. Transparency and addressing promotion biases can create a more inclusive and gender-equitable environment (Bustelo, 2003).

Figure 9

Awareness of maternity benefits
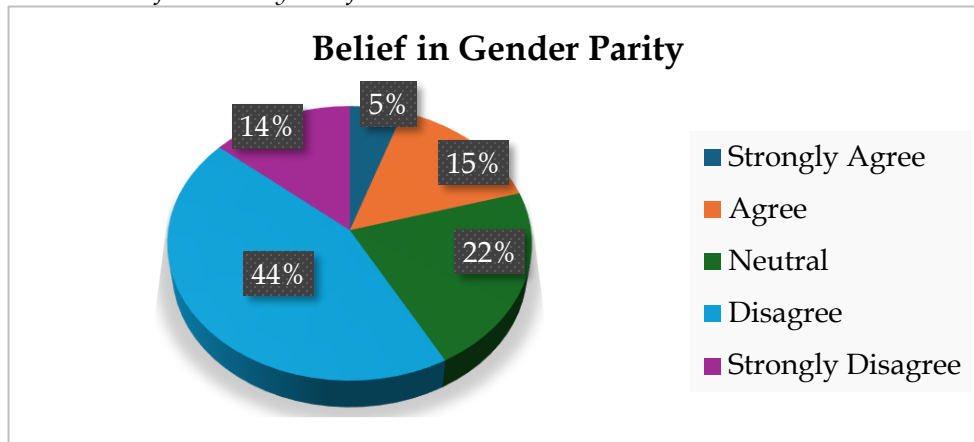
Transparency in Pay Structures and Promotions

Out of the employees surveyed, 54.2% reported that communications about pay structures from their employers were "Not Transparent," and 48.2% said the same about the communications from employers about promotion criteria. This mixed perception of transparency supports the literature's campaign for additional research regarding transparency for creating a fair and inclusive culture – something on which organizations are able to begin working immediately by adjusting communication strategies. The literature presents transparency as the answer to dissatisfaction and to showing employees that they are valued (Bose, 2012; Bustelo, 2003).

Figure 10

Transparency in communication
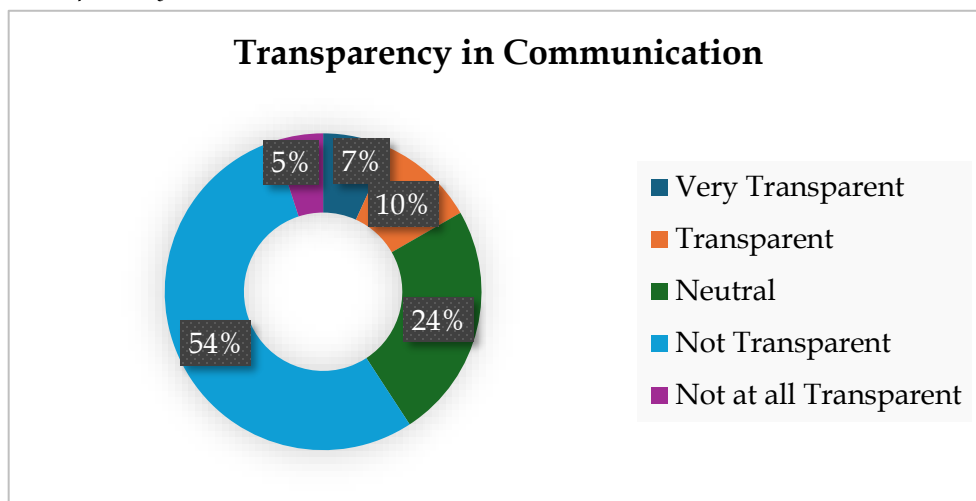
Figure 11

Transparency in promotion criteria
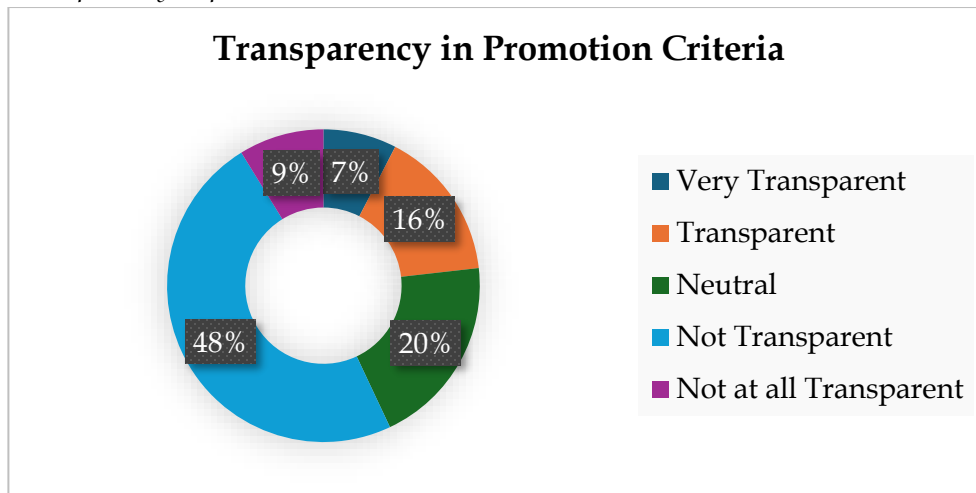
Inclusion in the Promotion Process

The literature mirrors employees' perceptions of promotion challenges (Bose, 2012; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Literature calls to address power imbalances and ensure organizational inclusivity may explain why

38.9% of the sample feel "Not Included" in the promotion process and 33.4% feel "Not at all Included" (33.4%). To echo that literature, mentorship programs, unbiased evaluation processes, and promotion criteria transparency could make organizations more inclusive (Bose, 2012; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013).

Figure 12
Inclusion in the promotion process

Inclusion in Promotion Process

- Very Included — 4%
- Included — 13%
- Neutral — 10%
- Not Included — 39%
- Not at all Included — 34%
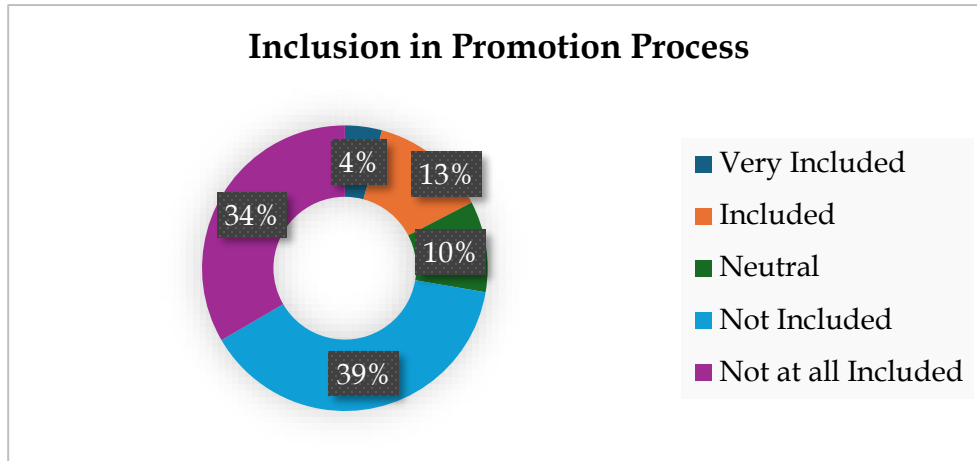
Importance of Transparency for Gender Equality

The literature supports the participants' consensus (57.7%) about the importance of transparency of promotion criteria in promoting gender equality. Emphasizing transparency of promotion criteria echoes findings in the literature and particularly demonstrates the critical role of transparency in the promotion of gender equality within the organization (Bose, 2012; Debusscher, Ansoms, 2013). This consensus represents a significant reason for organizations to prioritize transparency as a critical element of their diversity and inclusion initiatives, helping to create a workplace characterized by an environment of opportunity for career growth for all employees.

Figure 13
Importance of transparency for gender equality

Importance of Transparency for Gender Equality

- Very Important, 57.70%
- Important, 33.30%
- Neutral, 4.50%
- Other, 4.50%
- Not Important, 2.30%
- Not at all Important, 2.20%
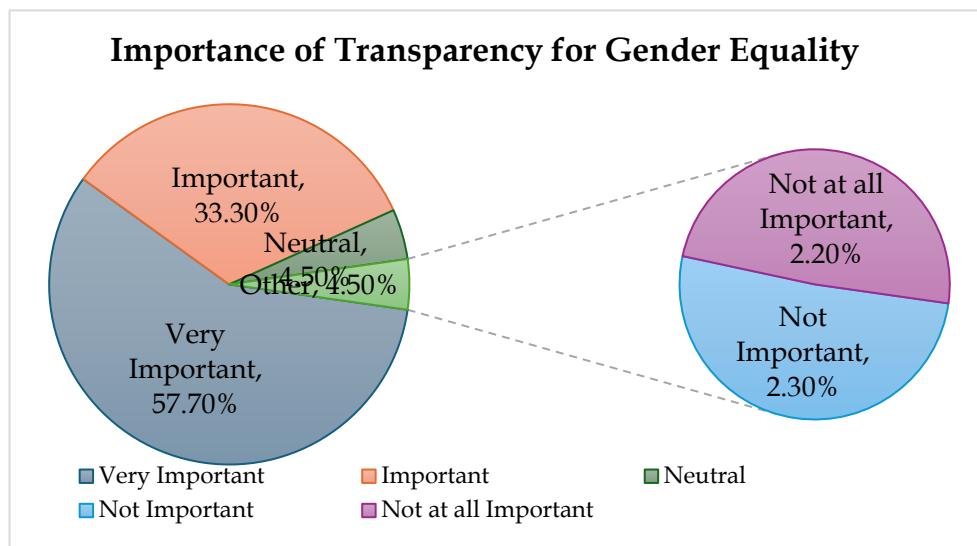
Equal Opportunities for Career Advancement

Equal career advancement opportunities were agreed upon (19.8%), disagreed upon (46.8%), some disagreed (8.9%), and strongly disagreed (25.5%). The agreement and some disagreement responses show that many participants believe the current promotion processes are unequal in career advancement. Due to the strong disagreement about equal career advancement opportunities, promotion processes fail to provide them (Bose, 2012; Debusscher, Ansoms, 2013). These findings recommend that organizations review their promotion processes to identify and address biases that may be preventing equal career growth.

Figure 14

Belief in equal opportunities
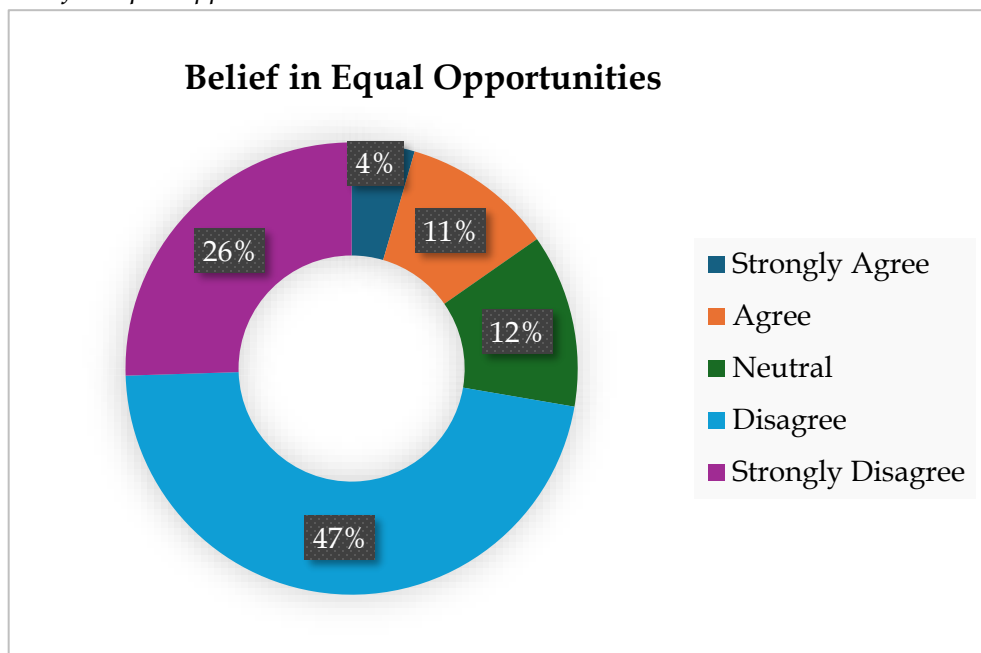
Effectiveness of Workplace Harassment Policies

Responses to whether current anti-harassment policies are effective are mixed. Most of the sample finds policies "Ineffective" (35.9%) and "Very Ineffective" (26.1%), but 8.9% find them effective. These results suggest policy gaps. Policies may need to be reviewed to reflect modern workplace dynamics. Organizational periodic assessments and employee input may help improve harassment prevention policies.

High levels of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" regarding equal career advancement opportunities suggest concerns about promotion inequities. This supports literature calling for comprehensive reviews of organizations' promotion processes to identify barriers to equal career opportunities and strategies to eliminate biases and foster inclusivity to promote fair and supportive environments (Bose, 2012; Debusscher, Ansoms, 2013).

Figure 15

Workplace harassment policy effectiveness

Workplace Harassment Policy Effectiveness

- Very Effective — 5%
- Effective — 9%
- Neutral — 24%
- Ineffective — 36%
- Very Ineffective — 26%
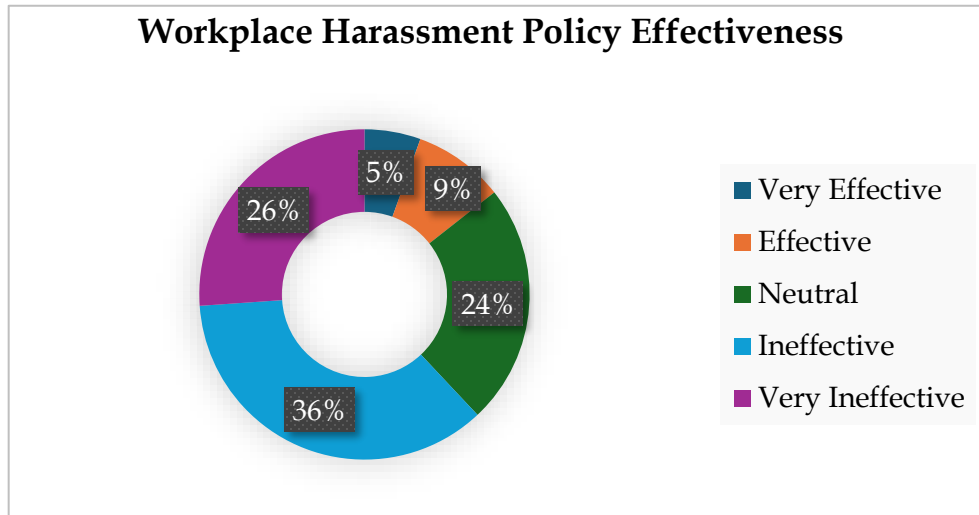
The alarming rate of harassment experiences (78.8%) among participants highlights an urgent need for organizational attention (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2016). Implementing and enforcing the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010, amended 2022) is crucial to address this issue comprehensively (Bose, 2012). Establishing confidential reporting mechanisms, fostering a zero tolerance culture, and providing thorough training align with the literature's emphasis on creating safer work environments (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2016).

Figure 16

Harassment incidence

Harassment Incidence

- Witnessed or Experienced — 79%
- No — 21%
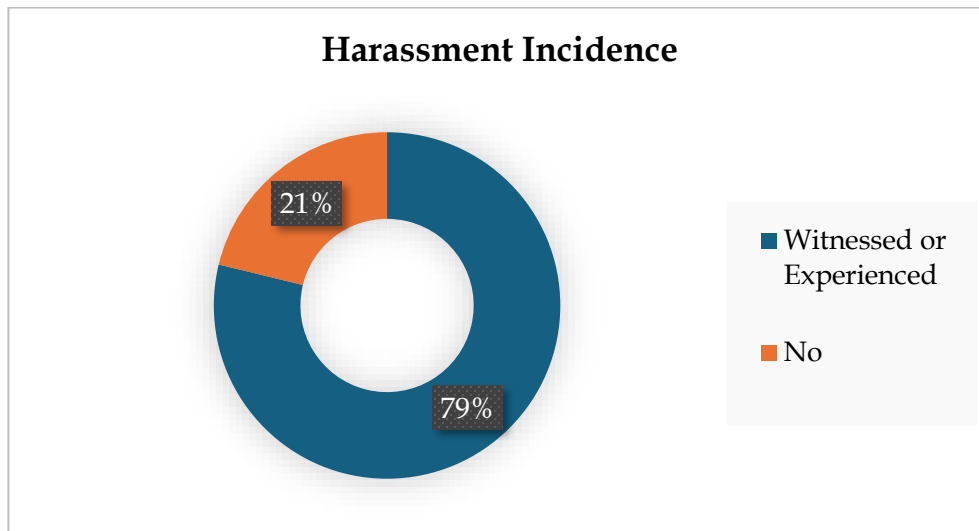
Contribution of Harassment Policies to Workplace Safety

Most respondents were skeptical about how harassment policies create a safe and inclusive workplace. There were 34.9% "Not a lot" and 15.7% "Not at all." While 12.5% "Agreed strongly" that harassment

regulations help create a safe and inclusive workplace, 13.3% preferred "Neither agree nor disagree." Companies may need to better explain their commitment to safety and harassment-free environments. Perceptual agreement interventions may improve mediated interaction consistency and robustness. Organizational communication and educational programs may better explain why policies are important and how they promote an inclusive and safe environment.

Yousaf & Schmiede (2016) suggest that the high percentage of employees who think policies are "Not at all" or "Not at lot" could improve awareness of the organization's entire message, including policies and procedures. Education may help foster a deeper sense of collective participation and togetherness among organization members for future events. Results reveal a big demand. Similar to prior research, 34.9% of "Not at lot" and 15.7% of "Not at all" disagree with the workplace harassment policy review. Education and policy explanation promote unitive understandings (Shuter, 1995).

Figure 17

Contribution to workplace safety

Contribution to Workplace Safety

- ■ Very Much — 12%
- ■ Somewhat — 24%
- ■ Neutral — 13%
- ■ Not Much — 35%
- ■ Not at all — 16%
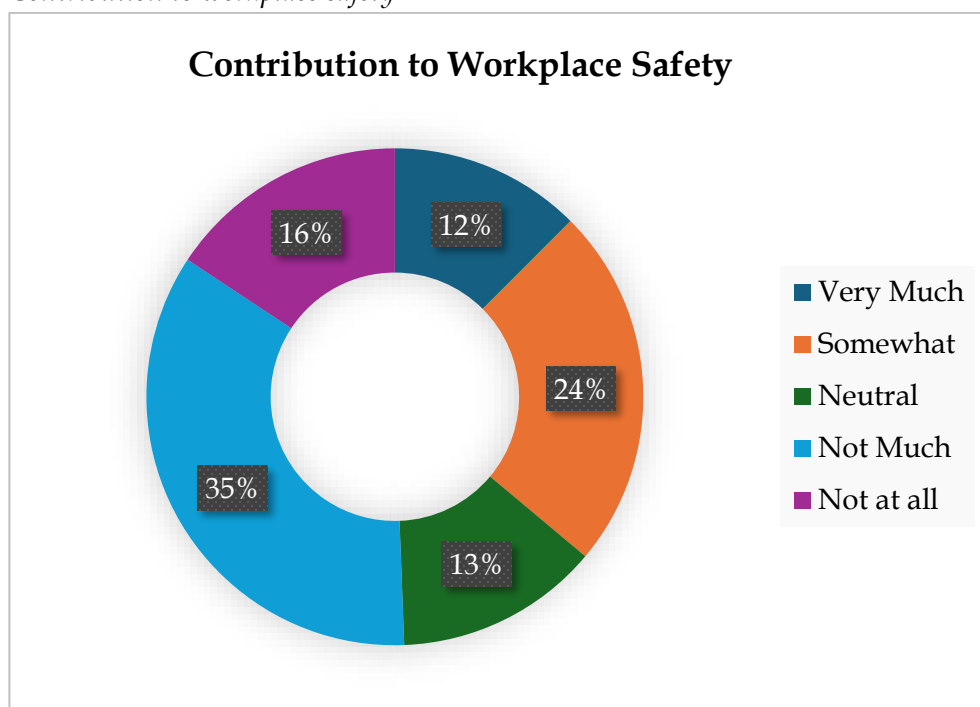
Results and Findings

To provide a comprehensive view of Pakistani workplace policies, 200 women participated in the survey. The study was gender-specific to highlight women's voices. It was all women in the study. From 18 to 56 years old, 35.2% were between 25 and 35, indicating a strong representation of early to mid-career professionals. The 14.4% sample of 56-year-olds provided valuable advice from highly experienced professionals. Non-profit employees made up 10.3%, private sector employees 43.5%, and public sector employees 46.2%. Understanding workplace policy implementation across industries requires this balanced profile. Employee satisfaction with their company's maternity leave policy was examined. Dissatisfied came in at 21.3%, "Very Dissatisfied" at 20.3%, and "Neutral" at 23.9%. Identifying

organizational challenges showed that proactive feedback paths between employees and leadership may be included in maternity leave policy adjustments (No Response: 8.4%). Importantly, 32.2% of respondents received less than 12 weeks of maternity leave. First-time mothers may lack support at this vital time. With 23.2% "No Response," maternity leave rules (12-16 weeks: 25.2%, 17-20 weeks: 10.3%, More than 20 weeks: 9.1%) may have been unclear.

During maternity leave, 58% were aware of the advantages, emphasizing the importance of clear communication, while 42% were unaware, emphasizing the need for organizations to improve communication tactics. 33.7% of positive responses regarding work-life balance were in line with the literature, but 33.6% of negative responses (33.6%) called for additional support mechanisms, and 47.4% of negative responses regarding career trajectory insisted on organizational interventions and resources for professional development during and after maternity leave.

25.4% were "Satisfied," 28.9% were "Dissatisfied," and 22.0% were "Very Dissatisfied," highlighting the need for organizations to reduce salary disparities. Companies must encourage clear communication and actively eliminate prejudices in the promotion process to address gender-based inequities, as 44.2% disagreed (Strongly Disagree 13.8%). Communication is crucial to creating a fair and inclusive workplace (54.2% "Not Transparent"), as seen by diverse sentiment on compensation structures (48.2% "Not Transparent") and promotions. 5.0%, 8.8%).

In the employee rating, 38.9% said they were not included in the promotion process, highlighting the need to address power imbalances through mentorship programs and clear communication of promotion criteria (Not at all Included: 33.4%). Nearly three-fifths agreed that transparency in promotion criteria is important (57.7%). Diversity and inclusion stand out as essential to a work culture that promotes equal career growth (Not Important: 4.5%, Not Important: 2.3%, Not at all Important: 2.2%).

Widespread disagreement about equal career advancement opportunities (46.8%) in the current organization's promotion processes prompted a comprehensive audit to locate and eliminate biases, creating an inclusive, equal platform for career expansion (Strongly Disagree: 25.5%). Inconsistent majorities declared workplace harassment policies ineffective (35.9% combined) or very ineffective (26.1%).

The target organizations were motivated by the shocking 78.8% harassment rate. Establishing and strengthening the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2010, amended 2022; No: 21.2%) was advised. Only a third of employees think the harassment policy promotes confidentiality (Somewhat: 23.6%, Neutral: 13.3%) and job protection (Not Much: 34.9%, Not at all: 15.7%). Thus, organizational practices, communication, and education on the policy's purpose and efficacy are needed.

Table 1

Variable	Category	Percentage	Number of Responses
Demographics	Female	100%	200
	Male	0%	0
	Other	0%	0

Variable	Category	Percentage	Number of Responses
Age	Under 25	24.2%	48
	25‑35	35.2%	70
	36‑45	20.1%	40
	46‑55	6.1%	12
	56 and above	14.4%	30
Organization Type	Private Sector	43.5%	87
	Public Sector	46.2%	92
	Non-Profit	10.3%	21
Maternity Leave Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	11.7%	23
	Satisfied	14.4%	29
	Neutral	23.9%	48
	Dissatisfied	21.3%	43
	Very Dissatisfied	20.3%	41
	No Response	8.4%	16
Maternity Leave Duration	Less than 12 weeks	32.2%	64
	12‑16 weeks	25.2%	50
	17‑20 weeks	10.3%	20
	More than 20 weeks	9.1%	18
	No Response	23.2%	48
Awareness of Benefits	Yes	58%	116
	No	42%	84
Impact on Work‑Life Balance	Positively	33.7%	67
	Neutral	24.3%	49
	Negatively	33.6%	67
	No Response	8.4%	17
Impact on Career Trajectory	Positive Impact	15.2%	30
	No Significant Impact	20.2%	40
	Negative Impact	47.4%	95
	No Response	17.2%	35
Salary Structure Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	9.2%	18
	Satisfied	25.4%	51
	Neutral	14.6%	29
	Dissatisfied	28.9%	58
	Very Dissatisfied	22.0%	44
Belief in Gender Parity	Strongly Agree	5.2%	10
	Agree	15.3%	31
	Neutral	21.5%	43
	Disagree	44.2%	88
	Strongly Disagree	13.8%	28

Variable	Category	Percentage	Number of Responses
Transparency in Communication	Very Transparent	6.8%	14
	Transparent	9.9%	20
	Neutral	24.1%	49
	Not Transparent	54.2%	109
	Not at all Transparent	5.0%	8
Transparency in Promotion Criteria	Very Transparent	7.6%	15
	Transparent	15.6%	31
	Neutral	19.8%	39
	Not Transparent	48.2%	96
	Not at all Transparent	8.8%	19
Inclusion in the Promotion Process	Very Included	4.2%	8
	Included	13.2%	26
	Neutral	10.3%	20
	Not Included	38.9%	77
	Not at all Included	33.4%	69
Importance of Transparency for Gender Equality	Very Important	57.7%	115
	Important	33.3%	66
	Neutral	4.5%	9
	Not Important	2.3%	5
	Not at all Important	2.2%	5
Belief in Equal Opportunities	Strongly Agree	4.5%	9
	Agree	10.8%	22
	Neutral	12.4%	25
	Disagree	46.8%	93
	Strongly Disagree	25.5%	51
Workplace Harassment Policy Effectiveness	Very Effective	5.5%	11
	Effective	8.9%	18
	Neutral	23.6%	47
	Ineffective	35.9%	71
	Very Ineffective	26.1%	53
Harassment Incidence	Witnessed or Experienced	78.8%	157
	No	21.2%	43

Variable	Category	Percentage	Number of Responses
	Very Much	12.5%	25
	Somewhat	23.6%	48
Contribution to Workplace Safety	Neutral	13.3%	27
	Not Much	34.9%	70
	Not at all	15.7%	30

Conclusion

The gender-focused study provides a unique perspective on Pakistan's complex workplace policies. To explore women's professional obstacles and disadvantages, we intentionally included 200 female participants in our sample. By excluding other gender groups, we prioritized marginalized voices. So, we may examine workplace policies from a new angle. The wide age range, with a high concentration of early to mid-career professionals, showed that workplace policies are relevant to career progression, work-life balance, and family planning. Professionals (n = 64) aged 56 and older with significant years of service helped us understand workplace characteristics over time. Finally, the multi-sectoral sample, which comprised private sector employees and public and non-profit organizations, helped us comprehend gender dynamics in workplace cultures across Pakistan. Each industry has its own issues and priorities; thus, specific strategies are needed.

A considerable number of female employees indicated unhappiness or ambivalence toward their workplace's maternity leave policy, supporting statistics that identified inadequate leave time and benefits coverage as the greatest difficulties. Organizations must thoroughly examine and revise their maternity leave policies with employee and leadership involvement to create a more helpful and equal workplace. Fair remuneration is essential because salary structure satisfaction varies widely. Significant dissatisfaction rates suggest that firms should close their compensation gaps. The troubling rise in gender parity views in promotions highlights the need to actively address gender-based inequities. Effective communication is needed to create a fair and inclusive workplace due to mixed views on pay structure and promotion transparency. Organizations must address power imbalances and foster inclusivity to address employee perceptions of inclusion in the promotion process.

Participants reported frightening harassment rates, indicating organizational urgency. The mixed opinion on workplace harassment regulations shows gaps that may require a re-examination and possible modification to match changing workplace dynamics. According to this survey, companies should assess and improve their workplace policies proactively. Workplace policies must be refined through transparent communication, inclusive tactics, and employee collaboration. Gender-based discrepancies in promotions, maternity leave policy issues, and workplace safety through harassment prevention will all be important priorities.

Emerging workplaces need safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable workplaces. This study can help Pakistani organizations and policymakers create policies that comply with legal frameworks and create a work environment that values diversity, promotes equality, and benefits all employees. This study's findings offer promising guidance for Pakistanis, where the way to more fair workplaces has been unclear.

Recommendations

1. **Maternity Leave Policies:** Extend maternity leave durations to ensure comprehensive support for new mothers, recognizing the physical and emotional tolls of childbirth and early childcare. Implement policies that can accommodate diverse family structures to ensure that the approach to maternity leave is inclusive and resonates with all employees.

2. **Awareness and Communication:** Design robust communication strategies to ensure that all employees, irrespective of their gender, understand workplace policies thoroughly, especially as they relate to maternity leave. Employ an inclusive communication approach to these policies that address potential biases and stereotypes associated with maternity leave, as well as initiatives that will work towards a more supportive and understanding workplace culture.

3. **Career Advancement and Gender Parity:** Create mentorship programs and professional development opportunities structured to provide support to women as they move toward, through and out of their maternity leave. Combat gender-based disparities in promotions through processes that are transparent, riddled of bias and that actively work to promote an equal culture.

4. **Transparency and Inclusion:** Increase transparency in pay structures and particularly, promotions, to ensure that employees understand the basis on which they will move up within the organization. Implement measures that work to create an inclusive path toward promotions, including unbiased evaluations, that are transparent about criteria to move up.

5. **Workplace Harassment Prevention:** Strengthen workplace harassment policies with a feminist perspective that addresses power imbalances, gender-based discrimination and the unique challenges of women. Prioritize training on recognizing and denying harassment, with an emphasis in creating a culture of respect, consent and zero tolerance for any type of harassment.

6. **Equal Opportunities:** Conduct comprehensive reviews of promotion processes to identify biases and eliminate them to afford an equal platform for growth for all employees. Establish a mechanism through which employees can voice their concerns over equal opportunities and provide a confidential and safe space to employees who attempt to do so.

7. **Intersectionality and Diversity:** Embrace an intersectional approach in policy development and implementation that recognizes and eradicates the unique challenges faced by those who sit at the intersections of gender, age, and sector. Encourage diversity at all levels of the organization's decision-making to ensure that a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives are informing their policies.

8. **Community Engagement:** Seek insights and collaboration on policy development from feminist organizations and activists to create a more inclusive and gender-sensitive workplace environment. Encourage open dialogue and feedback from employees and respect their experiences and perspectives while designing workplace policies.

9. **Research and Continuous Improvement:** Promote continual research and assessment of workplace policies to identify emergent challenges and areas for improvement. Establish feedback loops that

continually involve employees in the improvement of policies that reflect the dynamism of the workforce.

10. **Cultural Transformation:** Encourage a shift within organizations, that actively work to challenge traditional gender norms, stereotypes and biases, looking to develop and promote a work environment that value and supports individuals of all genders. Signal a public interest in creating an inclusive, equitable and empowering workplace for all by integrating feminist themes into organizational values and mission.

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