

Closing the Gender Gap: A Comprehensive Study of Bias and Reform in Asian Workplaces



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ABSTRACT: The chapter investigates the gender prejudice that continues to exist in Asian workplaces as well as the essential changes that are required to reduce the gender gap. Women's growth in leadership positions, high-paying occupations, and historically male-dominated fields is still hindered by systematic inequity, despite the fact that there has been improvement in areas such as education and labour participation. The research investigates the cultural, organisational, and structural variables that contribute to gender inequities. These elements include patriarchal norms, biased recruiting and promotion practices, and insufficient legal safeguards. A number of countries, including Japan, India, South Korea, and Singapore, have conducted case studies that demonstrate both successful changes and current issues. At the conclusion of the paper, suggestions are provided for policymakers, enterprises, and cultural leaders. These recommendations emphasise the need of fundamental changes in public policy, workplace culture, and societal attitudes in order to promote gender equality and improve economic development.

KEYWORDS: Gender Gap, Gender Bias, Asian Workplaces, Patriarchal Norms, Workplace Inequality

1. INTRODUCTION

There is still a widespread problem of gender inequality in the workplace across Asia, as cultural norms, organisational practices, and institutional impediments continue to restrict the possibilities and progress available to women. There is still a large gender imbalance in the workforce, notably in leadership positions, high-paying industries, and sectors that have historically been controlled by males, despite the fact that the area has made tremendous achievements in terms of education and economic growth (Adema et al., 2021). Women are often devalued and under-represented in the workplace as a consequence of patriarchal ideals, gender stereotypes, and antiquated organisational arrangements.

In addition to being a moral and social problem, gender gap is also a problem from the economic point of view. As a result of the fact that diverse and inclusive workplaces contribute to greater levels of productivity, creativity, and overall company success, research shows that eliminating the gender gap might greatly increase the economic development of Asia. A diverse range of opinions, improved decision-making processes, and a contribution to more sustainable development are all outcomes that result from the engagement of women in the workforce.

Systemic gender prejudice continues to exist, which is a huge obstacle for Asian countries that are working towards equality and progress. This is the case despite the potential advantages that may be gained. In order to address these discrepancies, extensive changes are required, which must address both visible and invisible obstacles that prevent women from fully participating in the workforce.

1.1 Objectives

This research paper aims to:

1. Investigate the root causes of gender bias in Asian workplaces, including cultural norms, organizational practices, and legal frameworks.
2. Explore the impact of gender inequality on economic growth and workplace productivity.
3. Analyze successful reforms and interventions from various Asian countries aimed at reducing gender disparities.
4. Provide recommendations for closing the gender gap through policy reforms, corporate strategies, and shifts in societal attitudes.

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1.2 Significance of the Study

In the process of working towards the creation of more egalitarian workplaces, the conclusions of this research are very important for policymakers, corporate leaders, and members of civil society institutions. It is possible for Asian countries to adopt measures that promote gender equality, improve women's involvement in the workforce, and support inclusive economic development if they first get a knowledge of the factors that contribute to gender prejudice and then learn from reforms that have been effective (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012).

This research also makes a contribution to the ongoing conversation about gender equality throughout the world by providing insights into the specific obstacles that women confront in Asian workplaces and the possibilities for revolutionary changes in the area.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gender Bias in Asian Workplaces

1. Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Values

Cultural norms and deeply rooted patriarchal values continue to shape gender dynamics across Asian workplaces. In many parts of Asia, traditional gender roles dictate that men are the primary breadwinners, while women are expected to prioritize caregiving and domestic duties. This belief system influences hiring practices, workplace dynamics, and promotion opportunities. In countries like India, Japan, and South Korea, these societal expectations result in the exclusion of women from high-level positions and limit their career advancement opportunities.

Cultural norms also discourage women from entering certain fields, particularly in leadership, finance, and technology, where male dominance is reinforced through both social expectations and workplace practices. A report by "the International Labour Organization (ILO) points out that in many Asian countries, women are more likely to be employed in lower-paying jobs and are significantly underrepresented in managerial roles, with fewer opportunities to break into senior leadership positions (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004). These cultural biases are particularly entrenched in rural areas, where education and career opportunities for women are even more limited due to traditional gender expectations. There is some particular sort of discrimination found at certain workplaces where women who are assertive and task oriented, are not liked by the management to be selected in their company as they think them to be a threat for them in future. (Heilman and Okimoto, 2007; Rudman and Phelan, 2008; Rudman et al., 2012). If a prospective mother applies for a job, she becomes the last option thinking that her maternity will hamper the work while she is pregnant and while she would deliver the child. (Hebl et al., 2007; Morgan et al., 2013). In addition to that, women who have children at home are less likely to get promotions than their male counterparts thinking that the responsibility of their child will hamper her work negatively. (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008).

2. Organizational Practices

Organizational practices in Asian workplaces further reinforce gender inequality. Gender bias often manifests in recruitment, promotion, and compensation decisions, with men being favored over women for leadership roles and key assignments. Women are also more likely to face penalties for taking career breaks due to motherhood or caregiving responsibilities, reinforcing the "motherhood penalty." A McKinsey study found that women in Asia are 18% less likely than men to receive a promotion, largely due to implicit biases and the perception that women are less committed to their careers (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Corporate cultures that reward long hours, presenteeism, and inflexible schedules create additional barriers for women, particularly those balancing work with family responsibilities. These environments often leave women out of informal networks, mentorship opportunities, and important decision-making processes, leading to fewer opportunities for advancement.

3. Structural Barriers

Beyond organizational practices, structural barriers such as inadequate legal frameworks, insufficient maternity leave, and lack of affordable childcare further restrict women's ability to fully participate in the workforce. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report highlights that many Asian countries lag in providing robust protections for women, particularly regarding equal pay, anti-discrimination policies, and family-friendly work environments (Bertrand et al., 2010). Countries such as India and Pakistan, for instance, face challenges in enforcing workplace equality laws, especially in the informal sectors where women are more likely to be employed.

The lack of accessible and affordable childcare and weak parental leave policies, particularly for fathers, places a disproportionate burden on women to manage family responsibilities. This often results in women either exiting the workforce or being pushed into lower-paying, flexible jobs that limit their career progression.

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2.2 The Economic Impact of Gender Inequality

1. Reduced Workforce Participation

Gender inequality in the workplace has significant economic repercussions. According to a 2020 World Bank report, closing the gender gap in employment could add up to \$12 trillion to the global GDP by 2025, with a substantial portion of this growth coming from Asian economies. The underutilization of women in the workforce, particularly in high-skilled and high-paying industries, restricts countries from reaching their full economic potential (Bloom et al., 2009).

The unequal participation of women also affects company-level performance. Research shows that companies with greater gender diversity in leadership tend to outperform their peers. A 2018 McKinsey study revealed that businesses in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability. This highlights the untapped potential of female talent in contributing to corporate success and national economic growth.

2. Pay Disparities

Wage inequality between men and women remains a critical issue across Asia. The gender pay gap varies by country but consistently places women at a financial disadvantage. In South Korea, for instance, the gender wage gap is one of the largest among OECD countries, with women earning approximately 34% less than their male counterparts (Boring, 2017). In Japan and India, women face similar disparities, with cultural and organizational barriers compounding wage inequality.

The undervaluation of women's work, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, education, and social services—fields where women are disproportionately represented—exacerbates the gender pay gap. Additionally, women's exclusion from leadership roles and high-paying industries further contributes to income disparities.

2.3 Successful Reforms in Asian Countries

1. Japan: Gender Quotas and Corporate Leadership

Japan's gender inequality in the workplace has long been a subject of concern. In response, the government introduced policies aimed at increasing female participation in leadership, including the implementation of gender quotas for corporate boards. In 2015, Japan passed legislation mandating that companies set targets for the number of women in management positions. Additionally, reforms promoting work-life balance, such as flexible work schedules and expanded parental leave, have been introduced to reduce the barriers faced by working mothers. This has enhanced the role of women in the workplace which is the evidence to the support provided by government to women resulting in their improvement and the nation's improvement in the long run.

While Japan has made progress, the cultural resistance to women in leadership remains strong. Women still occupy less than 10% of executive positions in Japan's largest corporations. However, continued efforts to reform corporate governance and promote gender equality signal a commitment to addressing these disparities.

2. India: Legal Reforms and Women's Empowerment Programs

India has taken significant steps to address gender bias through legal reforms and women's empowerment programs. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, passed in 2017, extends paid maternity leave to 26 weeks, making India one of the countries with the longest maternity leave periods in the world which also substantiates their employment without the worry of leaving their infant at home. India has also launched several initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship and participation in the workforce, such as the Women's Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP).

Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly in rural areas and the informal economy, where women have limited access to legal protections and opportunities for career advancement. Gender inequality in India's labor market is further exacerbated by low female workforce participation rates, with women accounting for only 22% of the total labor force. The women are also not aware of the policies the government has made for them. So, there must be provisions for the spread of policies to the rural women also.

3. South Korea: Family-Friendly Policies and Work-Life Balance

South Korea has implemented progressive family-friendly policies aimed at closing the gender gap. The government introduced paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements to encourage a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities between men and women. South Korea has also invested in childcare infrastructure to enable women to return to work after childbirth.

However, despite these reforms, South Korea's corporate culture still values long hours and presenteeism, which disadvantages women who prioritize work-life balance. Although women's workforce participation has increased, the country continues to struggle with a significant gender pay gap and low female representation in senior leadership roles. This fact still needs attention from the government or the policy makers.

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4. Singapore: Gender Diversity and Equal Pay Policies

Singapore has been recognized as one of Asia's leaders in promoting gender diversity in the workplace. The country has enacted laws that ensure equal pay for equal work and prohibit gender-based discrimination in employment. Companies in Singapore have also adopted inclusive hiring practices and established gender diversity targets.

While Singapore has made significant progress in promoting gender equality, challenges remain in achieving equal representation of women in senior leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated industries like finance and technology. However, the country's proactive stance on workplace inclusion serves as a model for other Asian economies.

2.4 Barriers to Reform

1. Cultural Resistance to Gender Equality

Cultural resistance remains one of the most significant barriers to workplace reform. In many parts of Asia, traditional views on gender roles are deeply entrenched, making it difficult to change attitudes toward women's participation in the workforce. Women are the ones who are bound by such cultural barriers which imposes problems to them not solutions. Even in countries that have enacted progressive reforms, societal expectations surrounding motherhood and caregiving often prevent women from fully participating in the labor market (Carter & Silva, 2011). Moreover, it is an unwritten dictum in most of the Asian countries that women have to look after the family if need arises. They are expected to leave their jobs or remain in the household if progeny is anticipated.

2. Weak Enforcement of Legal Protections

While many Asian countries have introduced legal protections aimed at addressing gender inequality, enforcement is often weak. In countries like India and Indonesia, for example, laws mandating equal pay or prohibiting workplace discrimination are not always enforced, particularly in rural areas and the informal sector. Without proper enforcement mechanisms, these legal protections remain ineffective in addressing workplace inequality. Thus, the policy makers have to be vigilant towards not only making the policies but towards their successful implementation also.

The literature suggests that while significant progress has been made in addressing gender bias in Asian workplaces, much remains to be done. Cultural norms, organizational practices, and structural barriers continue to impede women's full participation in the workforce. However, successful reforms in countries like Japan, India, South Korea, and Singapore offer valuable lessons for how gender inequality can be addressed through a combination of legal, corporate, and societal reforms (Cha & Weeden, 2014). Addressing these challenges will require sustained efforts from governments, businesses, and civil society to create more equitable and inclusive workplaces. Its not only the government, but the support of the local people and their willingness to change their attitude, which helps in the establishment of a gender favourable work culture.

3. CASE STUDIES OF REFORM IN ASIAN WORKPLACES

3.1 Japan: Gender Quotas and Corporate Governance Reforms

Japan has long been characterized by deeply entrenched gender norms that hinder women's participation in leadership roles. Despite being one of the world's largest economies, Japan's female labor force participation and representation in senior management remained low. Recognizing this as a barrier to economic growth, the Japanese government introduced several initiatives to promote gender equality in the workplace which helped women and the whole economy towards a favourable turn.

Reform Efforts

In 2015, Japan implemented the *Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace*, requiring companies with over 300 employees to set numerical targets for female representation in management positions. This policy marked a significant step toward gender parity in corporate leadership. Additionally, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "Womenomics" initiative aimed to increase the number of women in the workforce by creating policies that promote work-life balance, such as extended parental leave and increased availability of childcare facilities. Thus, the government there is aware towards the upliftment of women and working continuously towards that.

The reforms also included encouraging companies to establish internal diversity goals and publicly disclose progress that may lead to transparent discussion about the issues related to job roles of women. These initiatives were intended to break the cycle of male-dominated leadership and foster a more inclusive workplace environment.

Impact and Challenges

The introduction of gender quotas and corporate governance reforms has resulted in modest improvements in women's participation in leadership roles. By 2021, women held 13% of managerial positions in Japan, up from 7% in 2015. However, this falls short of the government's initial target of 30% female leadership by 2020. Cultural resistance, coupled with the traditional corporate culture that values long working hours, continues to pose significant challenges.

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While reforms have increased awareness and motivated some companies to adopt gender-diverse policies, many firms remain reluctant to significantly alter their management structures. Thus, while the reforms have been a positive step, achieving gender parity in Japan's corporate world remains a long-term challenge. This shows that the deep-rooted thought can be eradicated only if the mindset of people changes along with the governmental policies. The citizens of the country have to be open towards change related to gender roles.

3.2 India: Legal Reforms and Entrepreneurial Initiatives

India faces significant gender inequality across all sectors of its workforce. Women's participation in the labor force has historically been low, particularly in rural areas, where cultural norms heavily influence women's ability to pursue careers outside the home. The country's labor laws have been slow to address these disparities, but recent reforms have aimed to empower women economically and increase their participation in the workforce.

Reform Efforts

One of India's most notable reforms was the passage of the *Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act* in 2017, which extended paid maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks. This was designed to encourage more women to return to work after childbirth and reduce the "motherhood penalty" often associated with career breaks. Now, women can work even after the childbirth with a decent break where they can face the transition phase from an individual to a mother in a smooth manner. In addition, India launched the *Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)*, an initiative by NITI Aayog that aims to foster women's entrepreneurial spirit by providing mentorship, funding opportunities, and networking support. Most of the budding entrepreneurial women are getting benefit of this program. There were women who didn't get support for new ventures of their own, now getting benefits from this scheme.

The present era is the era of digitalization. It helps marketers to market their products with less expenses. To help the womenfolk of India with that, the *Mahila e-Haat* platform, created by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, is another reform aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs by offering them a digital space to market their products and services. These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to encouraging female economic participation.

Impact and Challenges

While these legal reforms and entrepreneurial initiatives have provided women with greater economic opportunities, the overall impact is mixed with some women getting its benefit and some beyond its reach. India's female labor force participation rate remains low, at around 22%. Cultural resistance, especially in rural areas, continues to prevent many women from entering the workforce. Additionally, the implementation of policies like extended maternity leave has faced criticism from employers, some of whom see the reforms as burdensome, leading to potential hiring biases against women which may be true to some extent because the employer might hesitate to have a no work and full salary employee for 26 weeks.

The success of entrepreneurial platforms such as WEP and Mahila-e-Haat has been more promising, with thousands of women gaining access to markets and resources that were previously unavailable. However, access to these platforms remains limited for women without digital literacy or those in rural areas, highlighting the need for broader infrastructural support.

3.3. South Korea: Family-Friendly Policies and Flexibility in the Workplace

South Korea has faced long-standing issues related to gender inequality in its workforce. Despite high education levels among women, cultural expectations surrounding motherhood and long working hours have contributed to the country's gender pay gap and low female representation in senior positions. In response, the South Korean government has implemented several reforms aimed at addressing these inequalities which are helping the women workforce in many ways but there are still some positive impacts that have to be implemented.

Reform Efforts

In recent years, South Korea has introduced policies that focus on work-life balance to encourage greater female participation in the workforce. The government has expanded parental leave benefits, allowing both parents to take extended leave following the birth of a child. Additionally, flexible working hours and telecommuting options were introduced, making it easier for working parents to balance their professional and family responsibilities.

The government has also launched initiatives such as the *Gender Equality Employment Policy*, which promotes the hiring of women in male-dominated industries. This policy aims to reduce the gender imbalance in sectors such as technology, finance, and engineering, where women have historically been underrepresented.

Impact and Challenges

South Korea's family-friendly policies have had a positive impact on women's workforce participation, particularly in younger generations. The introduction of flexible working hours has been widely adopted by companies, and the parental leave system has seen a significant increase in usage, with more fathers taking leave in recent years.

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However, South Korea still struggles with deeply ingrained corporate cultures that prioritize long working hours and presenteeism. These cultural expectations discourage women from pursuing leadership roles, as they are often seen as less dedicated to their careers due to family responsibilities. Additionally, despite government efforts, South Korea continues to have one of the highest gender pay gaps among OECD countries, indicating that more structural changes are needed to achieve lasting gender equality.

3.4 Singapore: Legal Protections and Gender Diversity Initiatives

Singapore has been one of the leaders in Asia when it comes to promoting gender equality in the workplace. With a highly educated female workforce and progressive labor laws, the city-state has introduced various measures aimed at reducing gender bias and promoting gender diversity in corporate leadership.

Reform Efforts

The Singapore government has enacted strong anti-discrimination laws, including the *Employment Act* and the *Equal Remuneration Convention*, which ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work. These legal frameworks provide women with protection against workplace discrimination and have encouraged companies to adopt gender-inclusive policies. It strikes a balance between genders and avoid workplace conflicts emerging out of discrimination.

In addition to legal protections, Singapore has launched gender diversity initiatives such as the *BoardAgender* initiative, which aims to increase female representation on corporate boards. The *Diversity Action Committee* was also formed to promote gender diversity in Singapore's top 100 listed companies, setting targets for women in leadership roles and encouraging companies to adopt diversity-friendly practices. All in all, we can see that Singapore has been working towards the upliftment of their female workforce by giving them equal opportunities so that they could contribute towards the society.

Impact and Challenges

Singapore's reforms have contributed to a more gender-diverse workforce, with women occupying a growing number of leadership roles in sectors such as finance, law, and healthcare. The country has also seen a narrowing gender pay gap, thanks to strong legal protections and corporate initiatives.

However, challenges remain in male-dominated industries such as technology and engineering, where women continue to face barriers to advancement. Cultural attitudes toward women's roles in the workplace, though more progressive than in many Asian countries, still present obstacles in achieving complete gender parity in Singapore also. Additionally, while Singapore's policies have been effective in promoting gender diversity, achieving equal representation in leadership roles remains a work in progress. Still the progress cannot be declined and it is happening on a rapid pace. The increased participation of women in the workplace especially on higher positions have led to economic growth in the country.

3.5 Comparative Analysis of Reforms

The reforms implemented across these four countries reflect both the diversity of approaches and the common challenges faced in addressing gender inequality in the workplace. While countries like Singapore and Japan have focused on corporate governance and legal frameworks, South Korea and India have placed emphasis on family-friendly policies and entrepreneurial support. Despite varying strategies, cultural resistance and organizational biases remain common barriers to success in all cases. The implementation of the policies become difficult with the deep-rooted traditional mentality of the citizens. The policies are made for the welfare of women so that they could better participate in the workforce but the practical aspect of the same is still questionable.

The experiences of these countries demonstrate that while legal reforms and policy initiatives are necessary, they are not sufficient on their own when it comes to the implementation phase. Cultural change, corporate commitment, and ongoing societal reform related education are essential to closing the gender gap in Asian workplaces. The success of gender equality reforms will depend on the ability to address both structural barriers and deeply ingrained social attitudes. (Chou & Cheung, 2013).

The case studies from Japan, India, South Korea, and Singapore reveal both, the progress and ongoing struggles in closing the gender gap across Asian workplaces. These reforms illustrate that while policy interventions can create a more equitable environment, long-term success will require a holistic approach that integrates cultural, legal, and corporate reforms. Through continued commitment to gender diversity and the dismantling of traditional biases, Asian countries can unlock the full potential of their workforce and achieve greater economic and social progress. If the policies are framed strategically and their implementation are given much attention, the outcome will be most fruitful in all aspects; from the upliftment of women to the growth of the economy.

4. KEY DRIVERS OF BIAS AND BARRIERS TO REFORM

4.1 Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes

1. Traditional Gender Roles

One of the primary drivers of gender bias in Asian workplaces is the persistence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. In many Asian societies, cultural norms dictate that men are the breadwinners, while women are expected to fulfil caregiving and domestic responsibilities. This belief permeates not only households but also workplaces, where women are often viewed as less committed to their careers and more suited for nurturing or supportive roles. This phenomenon is deeply ingrained in the minds of people that changes are difficult to accept. The locals are born and brought up with the notion that they cannot survive without the presence of women in the family. The men are posed as incompetent to handle the household chores and it is considered a matter of awe when men work at home whereas women doing the household chores doesn't come as a surprise to anyone.

For example, in countries like Japan and South Korea, the expectation for women to leave the workforce upon starting a family is deeply entrenched (Cooke, 2010). This perpetuates the "motherhood penalty," where women are penalized for taking career breaks or working part-time, limiting their opportunities for advancement. These stereotypes often lead to women being overlooked for promotions and leadership roles, reinforcing a male-dominated corporate hierarchy. Women have to take break from their jobs to look after their newborns or young kids. There are provisions to take leaves of a few days or months but there are no provisions even by the government to fill up for those years of women's work-life where she took a childcare break.

2. Male-Dominated Leadership

The prevalence of male-dominated leadership in many Asian countries further reinforces gender biases. Men in leadership positions may unconsciously or consciously prefer promoting other men, perpetuating a cycle of gender inequality. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "old boys' club," where informal networks and mentoring relationships primarily benefit male employees. Women, as a result, face greater challenges in accessing critical resources and opportunities for career advancement (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, this is not a highly established fact that men promote men and its practical significance needs to be checked but an employer prefers men because of the fact that a male employee will not go for maternity leave hampering his work profile.

4.2 Organizational Practices and Policies

1. Hiring and Promotion Bias

Gender bias in hiring and promotion processes is a significant barrier to closing the gender gap. In many Asian workplaces, women are frequently perceived as less capable of handling leadership roles or positions that require long working hours or travel. This bias is compounded by the assumption that women will eventually prioritize family over career, leading employers to pass them over for promotions. Research has shown that even when women possess equal or superior qualifications, they are less likely to be hired or promoted than their male counterparts.

In addition to overt bias, there are also systemic issues in how organizations evaluate performance. Women's contributions may be undervalued or overlooked due to implicit bias, while men may be rewarded for assertiveness or leadership traits that are not as easily associated with female employees. Again, this cannot be called an objective phenomenon as there could be discrepancies available. But women have certain limitations in the workplace like forbidding of night shifts, travel issues etc. which gives the employer a second thought whether he is ready to hire a female employee even after these issues.

2. Lack of Family-Friendly Policies

The absence of family-friendly policies, such as flexible working hours, parental leave, and affordable childcare, creates a substantial barrier for women in the workforce. Without supportive measures, women are often forced to choose between career advancement and family responsibilities (Kwon & Chun, 2015). This is particularly true in countries where the cultural expectation for women to be the primary caregivers remains strong, such as India and South Korea. They are expected to be present for all especially for children. Most women have to break their careers because of maternity and later they cannot continue their work because they have no one to look after the child after their leaves get over. Sometimes the period is so long that either they are not able to join the workforce or join for much lesser than what they deserve.

Many companies in Asia do not provide sufficient parental leave, especially for fathers, which places the caregiving burden disproportionately on women only. The lack of paternity leave or shared parental leave reinforces the stereotype that caregiving is solely a woman's responsibility. As a result, women face difficulties balancing work and family, which often leads to reduced workforce participation or career stagnation. The condition shows that women are considered to be the sole responsibility bearer of the child, their work is considered secondary and their primary responsibility is to look after the family and the child. If the norms are made in such a way where women's participation in the workforce is not considered important, they have nowhere to look upto.

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4.3 Structural Barriers

1. Legal and Regulatory Gaps

Weak legal frameworks for gender equality in many Asian countries exacerbate workplace bias. In some nations, laws protecting women from discrimination, unequal pay, or sexual harassment are either insufficient or poorly enforced. For instance, while countries like India and Indonesia have enacted gender equality laws, their implementation remains weak, especially in rural areas and informal sectors. This lack of regulatory enforcement leaves women vulnerable to bias, with little recourse for challenging unfair treatment. Even the maternity benefit act is not implemented by many of the small, private or unrecognised sectors, in result of which, the women force has to leave their jobs to look after their household. Neutral families are also one factor where there is no one to look after the child and the traditional mindset follows the long-established dictum that women have to make the sacrifice of leaving their external work. Women in South Asia are said to have low labour force participation rates. In Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, women participation is there in between 18 and 26 per cent of the total employees. (Ali, 2010)

Moreover, legal provisions for maternity leave and workplace protections vary widely across Asia. Countries like Singapore have implemented comprehensive laws that ensure equal pay and protect women's rights in the workplace. However, in many other countries, legal protections are inadequate, and women continue to face barriers in accessing justice for workplace discrimination. This has led to less participation of women in the workforce not because they do not want to work but because they cannot continue working as easily as their men counterparts.

2. Economic Inequality and Job Segregation

Gender bias in Asian workplaces is also perpetuated by economic inequality and job segregation. Women are overrepresented in low-paying, informal, and part-time jobs, while men dominate high-paying, formal sectors such as finance, technology, and engineering. This segregation is fuelled by the perception that women are more suited for caregiving or administrative roles and less capable of excelling in high-skilled or technical fields. However, there are changes in attitudes but that change is taking time to become casual for the masses who have remained under this impression since long.

In countries like India and Pakistan, women are disproportionately employed in the informal economy, where labor protections are minimal, and opportunities for career advancement are limited. This economic marginalization perpetuates the gender pay gap and restricts women's ability to move into leadership positions. The hike of women participation is seen in the past few years but that is not as per the expected percentage to cover the gap of past many years of disparity.

4.4 Cultural Resistance to Gender Equality Reforms

1. Social Expectations and Resistance to Change

Cultural resistance to gender equality reforms is a significant barrier in many Asian countries. Societal expectations surrounding women's roles in the family and workforce remain deeply ingrained, making it difficult for reforms aimed at promoting gender equality to take root. Even when legal reforms are introduced, cultural attitudes often hinder their implementation and effectiveness. The best example is the provision of maternity leave not paternity leaves which lay stress of the child care on women on a higher average.

For example, in Japan and South Korea, despite the introduction of policies promoting work-life balance and gender diversity, many women still face pressure to prioritize family responsibilities over career advancement because even if the government introduces certain laws, there is deep rooted belief that women are the ones who are aptly made for household duties. These cultural expectations contribute to the persistence of gender inequality, as even progressive policies may not be enough to shift deeply rooted societal norms.

2. Corporate Culture and Presenteeism

The corporate culture of many Asian countries, particularly in Japan and South Korea, places high value on long working hours, face time, and presenteeism. Employees are often judged by their physical presence in the office rather than the quality or efficiency of their work (O'Neill & O'Reilly, 2011). This creates a significant disadvantage for women, particularly those who are balancing family responsibilities, as they may not be able to work the same long hours as their male counterparts. There could be a provision to allow them flexible work so that they would not have to leave their jobs under the pressure of performing multiple responsibilities. It is said that women are multitaskers but that multi-tasking takes a toll on their mental and physical health, and this fact is avoided by many since it may assign many of their responsibilities to their male counterparts.

The culture of presenteeism not only excludes women from opportunities for advancement but also perpetuates the stereotype that women are less committed to their careers. Moreover, no employer wants to take the pain of giving women problem related t\leaves to his employees especially when he can do without them. Without structural changes to corporate culture, efforts to close the gender gap will remain challenging.

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4.5 Leadership and Mentorship Gaps

1. Lack of Female Role Models

The underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions creates a scarcity of female role models and mentors for younger women entering the workforce. This leadership gap makes it difficult for women to envision themselves in top positions or receive the mentorship and sponsorship needed to advance their careers. Mentorship programs are often dominated by male leaders, which may limit women's access to informal networks, career advice, and opportunities for growth. There are women leaders also but they are handful in numbers. They are taken as examples but the struggle and support, they have behind their present success is not known to many and not everyone's cup of tea.

2. Gender Stereotypes in Leadership

The perception that leadership qualities such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and competitiveness are inherently male traits further marginalizes women from leadership roles. Women who exhibit these traits may be seen as "too aggressive," while those who adhere to traditional gender norms may be viewed as "too passive" to lead. This double bind reinforces the gender leadership gap and contributes to a lack of diversity in decision-making roles. In many places, accepting women as leaders is too difficult for the male coworkers and following their instructions as managers, becomes unacceptable for them.

4.6 Media Representation and Public Perception

1. Gender Stereotypes in Media

The media plays a critical role in shaping societal attitudes toward gender roles, but in many Asian countries, media representation of women reinforces traditional stereotypes. Women are often depicted in caregiving or subordinate roles, while men are portrayed as leaders or authority figures. This skewed representation influences public perception and reinforces workplace biases against women seeking leadership or non-traditional career paths. The women folk are mostly represented in their household roles or depicted them happily performing multitasking activities. The society takes them as those who are happy in balancing their household and workplace responsibilities acknowledging these depiction and do not pay heed to prevalent medical writing which states that it poses serious health issues on women.

2. Public Awareness of Gender Bias

Public awareness of gender bias in the workplace varies significantly across Asian countries. In more progressive nations like Singapore and Japan, there is growing awareness of the need for gender diversity in leadership. However, in many other countries, public discussions on gender bias remain limited (OECD, 2020). This lack of awareness hinders the momentum for reform and allows workplace inequalities to persist.

The drivers of gender bias and barriers to reform in Asian workplaces are multifaceted, encompassing cultural, organizational, structural, and societal factors. Traditional gender roles, hiring and promotion biases, weak legal protections, and resistance to gender equality reforms all contribute to the persistence of the gender gap. Overcoming these barriers requires a concerted effort from governments, businesses, and civil society to address both structural inequalities and cultural attitudes. Only by tackling these key drivers of bias can true gender equality be achieved in Asian workplaces.

5. STRATEGIES FOR REFORM

Closing the gender gap in Asian workplaces requires comprehensive and multifaceted strategies that address both structural and cultural barriers. The following strategies offer a roadmap for fostering gender equality and promoting reforms that can lead to lasting change in workplace dynamics.

5.1 Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

1. Enforcing Gender Equality Laws

A key strategy for reform is to strengthen the legal framework surrounding gender equality in the workplace. Countries must ensure that existing laws—such as those preventing gender discrimination, ensuring equal pay, and providing maternity and paternity leave—are strictly enforced (Rastogi & Khandelwal, 2018). Governments should establish clear guidelines for employers, set penalties for non-compliance, and create dedicated oversight bodies to monitor progress. The lag lies in non-implementation of these laws because the government makes laws but cannot check it in every corner of the country. However, if the policy makers also appoint people who could check their implementation, it would help many women from leaving their jobs in lieu of the possible support from the workplace. The previously done research has also thrown light on the importance of legal reforms, their effective implementation, monitoring of the same, and making the general public and employees aware of their rights (Wickramasinghe & Jayatilaka, 2006).

For example, laws such as India's *Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act* or Singapore's *Equal Remuneration Convention* have had positive impacts, but their enforcement must be consistent and thorough across sectors and regions. Countries without robust

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legal frameworks should prioritize passing gender equality laws and ensure their effective implementation. There are laws but lack of practicality in many situations.

2. Mandating Gender Quotas for Leadership Positions

Gender quotas can play a critical role in ensuring women's representation in decision-making roles. Governments and organizations should consider introducing mandatory gender quotas for corporate boards and senior leadership positions. This has been successful in countries like Norway, where companies are required to maintain a minimum percentage of women on boards. A similar approach in Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, could accelerate progress toward gender parity in leadership. Obviously, the quotas must not be there avoiding merit but those who have merit and are leaving their jobs due to adverse circumstances, must be considered. In order to fulfil a country's goals of equality, HRM departments must also develop and implement such policies that include equal employment opportunity policies and practices in recruitment, promotion and training, family friendly policies, procedures and support mechanisms such as flexi-time, childcare and elder care support. (Benson & Yukongdi, 2005; Budhwar, Saini & Bhatnagar, 2011; Wickramasinghe & Jayatilaka, 2006).

Gender quotas should be accompanied by transparent reporting and accountability mechanisms. Companies should be required to publicly disclose their diversity metrics and progress toward meeting gender representation targets. In lieu of that, they will be free to exercise their autocracy in making rules. There are many private companies also who are making rules in favour of women but there are many who do it just for the sake of avoiding any legal action against them, they should be strictly dealt with.

5.2 Addressing Organizational Bias and Promoting Gender-Sensitive HR Policies

1. Implementing Unconscious Bias Training

Organizations should invest in unconscious bias training for employees, particularly for hiring managers and decision-makers. These training programs can help identify and address implicit biases that negatively affect women's career advancement. By raising awareness of how bias manifests in the workplace, organizations can create a more inclusive environment that values diversity and merit.

Unconscious bias training should be integrated into broader diversity and inclusion programs, ensuring that it is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing effort to create an equitable workplace culture. It will gradually bring a change of behaviour towards a more gender favourable attitude of all the workers. The manager must also be ready to bring changes in himself or the environment if so required.

2. Gender-Sensitive Recruitment and Promotion Policies

Organizations must adopt gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion practices to ensure that women have equal access to leadership positions. This can include creating gender-neutral job descriptions, setting clear promotion criteria, and ensuring diverse hiring panels (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004). Recruitment and performance evaluation processes should be regularly audited for gender bias, with corrective measures taken where necessary. It will not only bring a positive change in the organisation but also enhance the brand image of the organisation.

Additionally, companies should implement mentorship and sponsorship programs that specifically support women's career growth. Female employees should have access to mentors and role models who can guide them toward leadership roles and help them navigate organizational challenges. If given proper care to these points, the women workforce will become more productive for the organisation and their reputation in the social strata will also increase.

5.3 Enhancing Work-Life Balance and Family-Friendly Policies

1. Expanding Parental Leave and Childcare Support

One of the most effective strategies for closing the gender gap is to expand family-friendly policies that support both women and men in balancing work and family responsibilities. Governments and organizations should provide paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers, encouraging shared caregiving responsibilities and reducing the stigma around paternity leave. The general mass also has to bring a change in attitude. The work exclusively assigned to women, must be seen as the work of the family. If men would start taking care of the children, the phenomenon will prevail and instead of maternity leaves, there would be parental leave in all Asian countries.

Access to affordable and high-quality childcare is also crucial. Countries like Japan and Singapore have made significant strides in increasing the availability of childcare services, but more needs to be done to ensure that all employees, particularly women, can balance family obligations with their careers.

2. Promoting Flexible Working Hours and Telecommuting

Flexible working arrangements, such as telecommuting, compressed workweeks, and flexible hours, can help employees manage both their professional and personal responsibilities. These options are particularly important for working mothers, who often face the dual burden of career and family caregiving (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations

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successfully transitioned to remote work, highlighting the viability of flexible work arrangements. There were many jobs where work from home culture came in to form during covid and it continued in technical jobs later on also. Considering that, more and more such opportunities must be made available to all those women who are living in neutral families and their last resort between job and family is to leave their job.

By institutionalizing flexible work policies, organizations can create an environment that supports all employees, regardless of gender, and reduces the career penalties often associated with caregiving responsibilities.

5.4 Cultural Change and Corporate Leadership

1. Promoting Gender Diversity as a Business Priority

Organizational leadership plays a crucial role in driving gender equality reforms. CEOs and senior management should publicly commit to gender diversity and set clear, measurable goals for increasing women's representation at all levels. Gender diversity should be recognized as a key business priority that can drive innovation, improve decision-making, and enhance company performance.

This commitment must be reflected in company policies, performance evaluations, and leadership development programs. Companies that embrace gender diversity should also foster an inclusive culture, where all employees feel valued and supported in their professional growth. The policy makers of the companies must make policies on the ground which doesn't focus on the problems, women employment will pose rather they must focus on generating alternative solutions because of which many women may able to work in their company.

2. Combating Workplace Stereotypes and Fostering Inclusive Corporate Cultures

Cultural change within organizations is essential for addressing deeply ingrained gender biases. Employers must actively work to combat gender stereotypes that suggest women are less capable of leadership or unsuitable for high-pressure roles. This can be achieved through education, inclusive leadership practices, and policies that promote diversity and equality.

Organizations should also ensure that corporate cultures do not prioritize presenteeism or long working hours, which disproportionately disadvantage women. Instead, they should focus on results-based performance, allowing employees to achieve work-life balance without sacrificing career advancement. In fact, there are women who have broken the stereotypes and people must take their example while deciding on a job role as gender specific.

5.5 Supporting Women in Male-Dominated Sectors

1. Encouraging Women in STEM and High-Skilled Industries

Women continue to be underrepresented in high-skilled sectors such as technology, engineering, and finance. To address this, governments and organizations should introduce initiatives that encourage more women to enter and succeed in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields. This could include scholarships, mentorship programs, and internships targeted at young women interested in these industries. In fact, since women have started to work in the defence services, we do not hear that they left because they were not capable to something as their male counterparts did.

Additionally, companies in male-dominated sectors should implement gender diversity policies that promote the hiring, retention, and promotion of women. Creating networking opportunities, mentorship, and sponsorship for women in these fields can help break down the barriers that prevent them from advancing.

2. Gender-Sensitive Professional Development and Training

Organizations must also ensure that women have access to professional development and leadership training programs that can help them succeed in traditionally male-dominated industries. Leadership programs tailored to women's experiences can help them build the skills and confidence needed to advance in their careers. This includes training in areas such as negotiation, public speaking, and leadership. This may help women in boosting their confidence in any of the male dominated work place.

By fostering a pipeline of female talent in male-dominated sectors, companies can work toward more gender-balanced workforces and leadership teams. The trainings must be tailored for both men and women, it may help in recognising the fact that its not the gender which hampers our learning rather it's the inclination, attitude or aptitude irrespective of gender.

5.6 Media and Public Awareness Campaigns

1. Promoting Positive Gender Representations in Media

The media plays a powerful role in shaping public perceptions of gender roles. Public awareness campaigns and media representations that challenge traditional gender stereotypes can contribute to changing societal attitudes toward women in the workplace. Media should showcase successful women in leadership roles, particularly in industries where they are underrepresented, to inspire younger generations of women to pursue these careers. Such campaigns should be from the

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government and from the private media also. It will gradually melt the ice related to gender roles which has been sown in the hearts of people from decades.

Government and corporate-sponsored campaigns can also highlight the economic and social benefits of gender diversity, helping to shift public opinion in favor of gender equality reforms.

2. Encouraging Male Allyship and Gender Advocacy

Gender equality cannot be achieved without the active participation of men. Male allyship and gender advocacy are essential for driving cultural and organizational change. Men in leadership positions should champion gender equality initiatives, mentor women, and challenge discriminatory behaviors within their organizations. Not only at the workplace, males must take a stand for the women when it is expected of them to stay at home or look after the family. With unison, they must come up with a feasible solution which doesn't hamper the growth of both. The males at workplace must take initiatives to stand by their female co-workers in time of discrimination and need.

Male employees at all levels should be encouraged to take parental leave, engage in family responsibilities, and advocate for gender-diverse teams. By involving men in the conversation, gender equality efforts will be more inclusive and sustainable.

Closing the gender gap in Asian workplaces requires a comprehensive approach that addresses legal, organizational, and cultural barriers. Strengthening legal frameworks, promoting gender-sensitive HR policies, expanding family-friendly support, and fostering cultural change are all critical strategies for achieving gender equality.

Governments, corporations, and civil society must work together to ensure that gender reforms are not only implemented but sustained. By supporting women in leadership, combating stereotypes, and creating more inclusive workplaces, Asia can make significant strides toward closing the gender gap and unlocking the full potential of its workforce.

CONCLUSION

Closing the gender gap in Asian workplaces remains a pressing challenge, deeply rooted in cultural norms, structural barriers, and ingrained biases. While significant progress has been made in recent decades, particularly with the implementation of gender equality laws and reforms in some countries, much more needs to be done to achieve true parity. The persistence of traditional gender roles, unconscious biases in hiring and promotion, and the absence of robust family-friendly policies continue to limit women's full participation in the workforce.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that combines legal reforms, organizational change, and cultural transformation. Strengthening and enforcing gender equality laws, promoting gender-sensitive human resource policies, and introducing flexible working arrangements can alleviate many of the barriers women face in the workplace. At the same time, combating workplace stereotypes, fostering inclusive corporate cultures, and increasing female representation in leadership positions are essential for creating environments where women can thrive professionally. Whenever changes are introduced in any organisation to subside the gender discrimination, it results into an organisation which changes in a positive manner. (Cailin. S. & Leanne S, 2015)

Moreover, public awareness campaigns, positive media representations of women in leadership, and male allyship are critical to changing societal attitudes toward gender roles. Engaging men as advocates for gender equality and creating mentorship opportunities for women in male-dominated fields can further support progress.

Ultimately, closing the gender gap in Asian workplaces is not just a moral imperative—it is an economic one as it helps in the economic development of the family, society and the nation as a whole. Gender-diverse workforces are shown to enhance innovation, improve decision-making, and drive overall organizational performance. By removing the barriers that limit women's participation and advancement, Asian economies can unlock their full potential and achieve more sustainable, inclusive growth. Governments, businesses, and civil society must work together to create a future where gender equality is the norm, not an exception. Only through collective action and sustained reform can the gender gap be meaningfully closed, paving the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

Thus, it can be concluded that closing the gender gap is a multifaceted approach which requires effort from the government, the society, the male counterparts and from the women itself. There are many instances where the government of different countries have made laws for the upliftment of women, which can be a stepping stone to all those who want to work towards closing the gender gap at the workplace.

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