

A Thesis Study on
Women's Participation in Leadership Roles in Bangladesh

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. The research presented in this study is my original work and has not been submitted for any other academic qualification.
2. I have duly referenced every piece of information, idea, or data I obtained from external sources.
3. I have omitted all prior publications in this study, except where I have specifically indicated their inclusion.
4. I have conveyed my appreciation to all the people and organizations that assisted me with this research.

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Abstract

This research examines the involvement of women in leadership positions within Bangladesh. It identifies the primary barriers and encouraging factors, as well as approaches that companies can adopt to elevate more women into higher management positions. Despite progress in achieving gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles due to various cultural, social, and organizational issues. This research examines the impact of unjust human resource policies and workplace culture on the professional advancement of women, utilizing in-depth qualitative analysis as well as quantitative data. The data suggests that to support more women in achieving leadership, we must focus on policy changes, superior mentoring opportunities, and flexible employment arrangements. The study ends with suggestions for companies and decision-makers to create a fair and inclusive workplace.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

An increasing number of individuals believe that the presence of women in leadership roles is essential to the growth of the organization and the advancement of socio-economic development. Global evidence shows that inclusion of diverse leaders, especially women, fosters innovation, improves decision-making, and improves organizational performance. Despite increasing education and employment opportunities for women in Bangladesh, there is a severe shortage of women in leadership positions. Although there is a strong presence of talented and capable women, most leaders in business and government are men. This crisis is an obstacle to realizing gender equality and affecting the broader development of the country.

Historically, the societal and cultural landscape of Bangladesh has been profoundly influenced by conventional gender roles. Such positions commonly trap women in domestic duties, hindering their professional development. Enduring stereotypes hinder women's efforts to step into leadership opportunities. Even though numerous women excel academically and have careers in various sectors, they continue to encounter obstacles that hinder their chances of advancement. The societal notion that women ought to juggle both employment and household responsibilities intensifies the problem, creating a disparity in how tasks are allocated in domestic and work environments.

Recognizing biases in the workplace is crucial, as they can hinder women's chances of reaching leadership positions. These biases originate in male-centric work settings and can manifest in areas such as recruitment, advancement, and leadership assessments. These tendencies often give men an edge, particularly for senior roles, resulting in the notion that they excel as leaders. Consequently, even the most talented women might experience doubts about their leadership skills, creating obstacles to their progression to top positions.

The difficulties present in the work environment impede women's advancement into leadership roles. Challenges like rigid work schedules, insufficient parental leave, and a lack of assistance for women managing both career and family responsibilities contribute to these hurdles. In the absence of crucial support systems, women tend to have a challenging time juggling work and family commitments, which can diminish their aspirations for leadership roles. In addition, the

scarcity of mentors and support networks for women prevents them from obtaining the resources and opportunities essential for their career development and emerging as leaders.

Bangladesh has witnessed crucial actions aimed at alleviating the difficulties that women encounter. There is a growing trend of women entering leadership positions in both governmental and corporate environments. This shift is occurring due to government initiatives promoting gender equality, the efforts of advocacy organizations, and the increasing recognition of accomplished women. While advancements have been made, there remains a significant journey ahead to attain complete equality in leadership roles. Challenges remain prevalent, and for real change to happen, it is essential to alter long-standing beliefs and enhance the supportiveness and inclusivity of organizations toward women.

Bangladesh needs to develop a comprehensive action plan to empower women leaders to succeed. These strategies should focus on increasing the participation rate of women and facilitating their success in leadership roles. This points to the need to redress the injustices women face, assure equal access to career advancement, provide a nurturing work environment, and encourage women to take leadership positions that challenge established norms there is not accepted. By taking this approach, Bangladesh can harness the potential of its female workforce and provide equal opportunities for leadership by recognizing and valuing the contributions of women.

1.2 Research Problem

Several organizations have implemented programs focused on gender diversity, but the extent of their impact is still unclear. Women continue to encounter numerous challenges, including workplace bias, a lack of mentors, and struggles in achieving a balance between their professional and personal lives (Rahman & Sultana, 2023). The situation is aggravated by longstanding attitudes that prioritize familial connections over career aspirations (Hossain, 2021). The prevalence of gender stereotypes shapes opinions about women's capabilities as leaders, which hinders their access to executive roles. The issue is compounded by the inadequate support for women in their workplaces, characterized by poor parental leave policies and a need for greater flexibility (Khan, 2022). This research will examine the obstacles faced by

female leaders in Bangladesh and propose strategies to enhance their leadership opportunities. The focus will be on transforming policies, cultivating a positive workplace culture, and developing empowerment strategies to improve the environment for women in leadership positions.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study examines the current status of female leaders in Bangladesh. The analysis will concentrate on the representation of women in diverse fields and industries. The objective of this research is to clarify the variances between male and female leaders, particularly in areas such as executive positions, board discussions, and political roles. It will also explore the significant obstacles that contribute to women not advancing to senior positions, such as workplace prejudice, a lack of mentorship opportunities, and societal expectations that restrict their career progression. Another key objective is to assess the effectiveness of existing human resource policies in promoting women in leadership roles. This means evaluating recruitment strategies, promotion pathways, and work-life balance options to see if they align with the difficulties women experience. The analysis will delve into the cultural and societal dynamics that impact women's career paths, highlighting the ways in which traditional concepts of gender roles and leadership shape their access to job opportunities. It aims to formulate practical solutions to elevate the number of women in leadership by gaining insight into these issues. The recommendations will target both corporate executives and government officials, emphasizing strategies to enhance women's empowerment, foster inclusive work environments, and promote genuine gender equality in leadership roles.

1.4 Significance of the study

The importance of this study lies in its exploration of the challenges that obstruct gender equality in leadership positions. It further clarifies the challenges that women face in advancing their careers. Policymakers, HR practitioners, and organizational leaders can utilize the results to develop gender-fair policies that contribute to a more inviting workplace for everyone. Findings from the research indicate beneficial strategies, including mentoring programs and flexible

working arrangements, to assist women in advancing their professional paths. In addition, it can be leveraged for future research regarding women's leadership in developing regions, fostering an expansive conversation about achieving gender equality in leadership roles.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The research focuses on a range of perspectives that shed light on the elements that either support or impede women's participation in leadership roles. Eagly and Karau's Gender Role Theory, established in 2002, suggests that the expectations and beliefs of society considerably impact the likelihood of women attaining leadership roles. Many conventional perspectives connect leadership attributes to male characteristics such as power and decisiveness. This situation might cultivate inequitable views towards women occupying senior positions. Thus, these prejudices impact employment decisions, opportunities for promotion, and the way women are viewed in leadership positions, which complicates their career advancement.

In addition, Barney's Resource-Based View (RBV) from 1991 underscores that a leadership team with diverse backgrounds contributes to improved competition for a company. Organizations that promote gender diversity benefit from a wider range of ideas, improved decision-making, and enhanced innovation, all of which contribute to superior performance (Grant 1996). Despite these advantages, women's representation in leadership positions remains low due to structural and cultural barriers within organizations that hinder their ability to realize their full potential.

The study furthermore addresses Feminist Leadership Theory, which considers the interaction between gender and power in shaping leadership practices (Squires, 2007). This theory challenges traditional leadership approaches that adhere to rigid hierarchies and promotes a focus on inclusivity and collaboration instead. The objective is to deconstruct the unfair frameworks that complicate life for women. Centered on emotional intelligence, feminist leadership advocates for inclusive decision processes and the promotion of equality at work (Chin 2013).

Additionally, The Glass Ceiling Theory explains the hidden obstacles that women encounter when trying to reach high leadership positions. This theory, introduced by Morrison et al. in

1987, sheds light on the invisible challenges that restrict women's access to top positions, regardless of their competencies and background. Unjust practices, insufficient mentorship, and restricted access to vital networks exacerbate these obstacles, hindering women's advancement in their careers (Cotter et al., 2001). To effectively confront these obstacles, organizations should revise their policies and promote a culture that supports equal opportunities for women in their professional growth.

Social Role Theory is another key idea that elaborates on the foundations of Gender Role Theory. According to Eagly (1987), the disparities in leadership opportunities between men and women stem from the societal division of labor. The theory indicates that women are usually conditioned to concentrate on caregiving and supporting groups, while men are generally inspired to take on roles that require leadership and authority. Social expectations influence organizational dynamics, which complicates the perception of women as inherent leaders (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

This study integrates various concepts to gain a deeper insight into the obstacles and prospects faced by women in leadership roles in Bangladesh. It highlights the necessity for substantial reforms within organizations and society to ensure that leadership is equitable for all individuals.

2.2 Global Trends in Women's Leadership

A growing number of people are emphasizing the crucial role of women in leadership. Research consistently reveals that businesses with leaders from diverse backgrounds, particularly women, excel more than those that have only male leaders. McKinsey & Company (2021) highlights that teams characterized by diversity are likely to make more effective decisions, generate more income, and foster greater innovation. The noticeable progress is most pronounced in firms that have taken steps to minimize the gender gap within their leadership teams. Key measures such as providing flexible work arrangements, guaranteeing equal compensation, and facilitating mentorship have contributed to fostering a more inclusive atmosphere for leaders (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Numerous nations are striving to boost the representation of women in leadership positions. In particular, countries like Norway and Sweden in the Nordic region have enacted laws that

stipulate a minimum number of women on corporate boards, which has contributed to an increase in women reaching top executive roles (Teigen, 2019). Similarly, Canada and Germany have enacted legislation aimed at achieving a greater equilibrium between professional and personal life, ensuring equal parental leave, and implementing initiatives that promote women's career advancement (OECD, 2020). Such initiatives have contributed to a marked rise in the number of women occupying top leadership positions, illustrating that the right policies can play a crucial role in closing the gender gap in leadership. In contrast, several developing countries, persistent cultural norms create significant barriers for women aspiring to take on leadership positions. In societies with rigid gender expectations, women often face additional obstacles such as discrimination in the workplace, restricted networking chances, and minimal assistance for advancing their careers (UN Women, 2021).

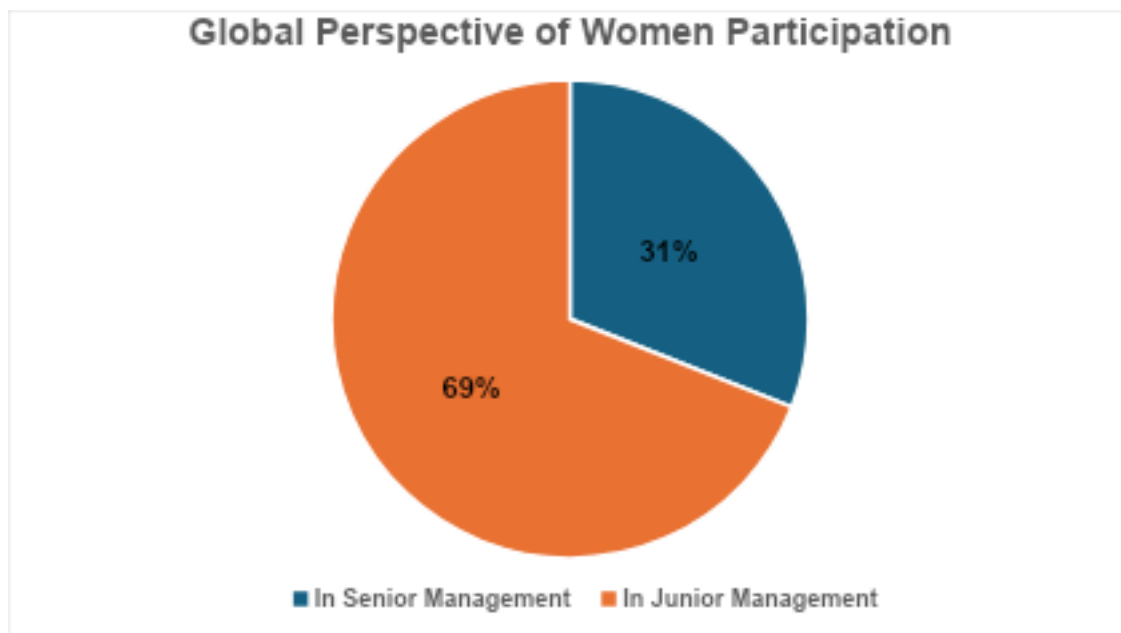


Figure 1: Global Perspective of Women Participation in Senior & Junior Management

Source: DigitalDefynd 2023.

As of 2023, women have 31% of senior management jobs around the world. This demonstrates a slow but noticeable uptick in the presence of women in executive roles across various firms (DigitalDefynd 2023). Nevertheless, countries including India and Rwanda are achieving positive outcomes by launching leadership development programs and enacting policies designed to reduce discrimination and support women's progress across multiple areas (Kabeer, 2021).

Across the globe, women are rising to hold more political leadership roles, not limited to the business world. The achievements of women in leading political positions in countries like New Zealand and Finland serves as an important precedent for enhancing gender representation in governance. Evidence suggests that female leaders tend to emphasize social welfare, education, and healthcare, enhancing societal progress as a result (Dahlerup 2018). These examples illustrate that female leadership is essential not only for economic growth but also for fostering equitable and progressive communities.



Figure 2: Global Perspective of Corporate Leadership (Man vs. Women)

Source: NGC Project.

The composition of CEOs in the S&P 500 is heavily skewed, with 94% being male and only 6% female (NGC Project). The businesses led by these female CEOs have outperformed their competitors significantly. Despite progress made, challenges remain in attaining equal representation of women in leadership positions. In numerous industries, women continue to be underrepresented in senior positions, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, disproportionately impacting women's career prospects and work-life balance compared to men (ILO, 2021). To foster progress, it is essential for organizations and governments to revise their policies and cultivate a workplace culture that guarantees women equal access to leadership positions and creates a welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

2.3 Women's Leadership Trends in Bangladesh

In recent decades, there has been a notable advancement in women's leadership roles in Bangladesh, particularly within the realms of politics, business, and nonprofit organizations. Renowned around the world, Bangladesh boasts a legacy of strong female leadership, with women having held the office of Prime Minister for over twenty years (World Economic Forum, 2022). As a result, an increasing number of women are being inspired to engage in government roles. As of February 2024, the representation of women in Bangladesh's parliament stands at 20.9% (UN Women 2024). Still, in different areas of leadership, the proportion of women is markedly scarce. Although there are more women participating in the workforce, they remain underrepresented in top management positions within companies (ILO, 2021).

The fashion and financial industries are making some progress in hiring more women, particularly in jobs at the mid-management level. Despite progress, a notable gap persists in ascending from mid-level roles to upper leadership, caused by unfair practices and impediments within the work environment (Rahman & Sultana, 2022). An increasing number of women are launching their own businesses, supported by microfinance organizations and government initiatives that provide financial assistance and training (Kabeer, 2021). Yet, a lot of women entrepreneurs find it hard to scale their businesses because they lack access to essential networks, funding opportunities, and support from various institutions.

While many major firms in Bangladesh implement international guidelines on gender diversity, these initiatives are often ineffective because local cultural beliefs tend to hinder women from aspiring to leadership roles (Nasir et al., 2020). Companies in the private sector are gradually lagging in adopting gender-focused policies, including flexible schedules, support for childcare, and equal remuneration. This hinders women's advancement in their respective fields. Addressing these challenges requires policy changes and a shift in the company culture to guarantee equal opportunities for women to assume leadership roles.

2.4 Challenges in Bangladesh

Although there has been some progress, women in Bangladesh encounter significant barriers in their quest for leadership roles in different areas. A key difficulty stems from entrenched societal views that promote men for such positions, fostering the belief that women lack the competence to oversee important duties (Haque & Bari, 2021). Leadership is often stereotypically tied to qualities like assertiveness and control, traits that society typically categorizes as male. On the other hand, women are typically viewed as caregivers and are frequently assigned lower-status roles, making it more challenging for them to gain recognition as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

One significant challenge women encounter in the workplace is bias. They frequently experience inequitable treatment, such as receiving lower pay, being excluded from significant decisions, and having limited opportunities to develop their skills (Nasir et al., 2020). It is surprising that 99% of people in Bangladesh have prejudiced views on women. The data indicates that 69% of individuals consider men to be more effective leaders in politics, and 88% view men as having a higher proficiency in business operations- this data is sourced from community surveys conducted in 2024. In areas where men predominate, women experience obstacles stemming from the scarcity of mentors and sponsors to guide them toward success. Consequently, women frequently must invest more energy than men to validate their leadership skills, which can lead to them feeling worn out and discouraged (ILO, 2021).

The challenge of managing both professional and personal responsibilities makes it more difficult for women to attain leadership roles. Many organizations in Bangladesh fall short in providing beneficial policies for working mothers, including parental leave, childcare options, and adaptability in work schedules. This leads many women to have to prioritize either their careers or their family obligations, stifling their professional advancement (Rahman & Sultana, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation worsened as women had to take on more caregiving duties, prompting a substantial number to resign from their jobs (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Many women-led businesses encounter obstacles in accessing the necessary capital for their growth and development. Although microfinance programs have enabled certain women to launch businesses with small loans, securing larger loans remains a challenge. Financial

institutions frequently impose stricter lending criteria on women, and societal attitudes can hinder their ability to secure investors (Kabeer, 2021).

To overcome these obstacles, it is essential that we take multiple actions. This encompasses modifying laws, guaranteeing that companies are dedicated to fostering gender equality, and shifting attitudes towards women in leadership positions. It is essential to strengthen the laws to provide assurance for equal pay, maternity benefits, and protection from discriminatory practices. Organizations need to prioritize funding for programs that assist women in strengthening their leadership competencies. Furthermore, promoting the benefits of women in leadership positions can change perceptions and foster a more supportive environment for women occupying these roles.

2.5 Case Studies on Women's Leadership and Gender Diversity in Bangladesh

- **Women Leadership in Banking Industry**

The participation of women in banking is rising in Bangladesh, especially among those in positions of authority. While facing issues like stereotypes and conventional expectations, a vast number of women have risen to prominent positions and have taken on crucial decision-making responsibilities. For example, appointing women to positions such as Managing Directors or Chief Operating Officers marks a significant advancement for gender-equality within the finance sector.

Women in the banking industry often face challenges when trying to assume leadership roles. Due to a male-dominated work culture, they often encounter inequitable treatment related to their gender and have reduced prospects for career progression. Razia Sultana is a remarkable success story, being the pioneer woman to assume the role of Managing Director in a commercial bank (BCBL) in Bangladesh. Her success highlights the progress that many women have made, yet it also reveals the obstacles they continue to face in attaining leadership roles. Much of her achievement stems from her strength in recovering from discrimination related to her gender. This demonstrates the more significant obstacles that women face in the banking field. Even though organizations are starting to adopt measures for gender equality, the transition

is occurring at a sluggish rate. Women still occupy far fewer top leadership positions than men do.

- **Corporate Endeavors to Enhance Gender Diversity**

Foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) active in Bangladesh are actively working to improve gender-diversity in the workplace. Organizations such as Unilever Bangladesh and Grameenphone have established HR policies that promote women's participation in the workforce. The regulations involve ensuring equal pay for the same job roles, adopting hiring methods that strive for gender parity, and establishing mentorship programs specifically aimed at facilitating women's career development.

Numerous large corporations have established training initiatives aimed at educating their employees about gender-related topics and fostering leadership capabilities among women. While these measures indicate progress, the pace is slow, and women still struggle to secure top positions. A notable success story is Shahida Nasreen, who made history as the first woman to become CEO of a large corporation (Grameenphone, part of the Telenor Group) in Bangladesh, demonstrating that women can excel in leadership roles in business.

Despite efforts to address inequalities, women still face significant challenges in advancing their careers due to persistent gender biases in the workplace. Multinational companies should focus on employing women and fostering a nurturing atmosphere throughout their career journey. According to the 2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Report for Bangladesh, 58% of women working in multinational firms feel unsupported when it comes to juggling work and family obligations. As a consequence, women frequently find themselves abandoning their careers halfway through.

- **Women's leadership in Media and Journalism**

Another crucial field in Bangladesh witnessing greater female engagement is the media sector. In recent decades, there has been an increase in the number of women pursuing careers in journalism and media. Yet, they face significant hurdles in their pursuit of leadership opportunities. While women comprise nearly 40% of the workforce in media organizations, they frequently lack representation in leadership roles such as editors and managers. Despite the vital

contributions of female journalists, they often encounter issues such as discrimination, harassment, and inequitable chances for progressing in their professions.

Shahida Sultana stands out as a significant figure, being the first woman to serve as a host for a prime-time news show on Bangladesh Television (BTV). Her accomplishments indicate a steady progression of women in the media field. Despite changes, numerous people still view media leadership as predominantly a male domain. According to a 2023 survey, 63% of respondents feel that men are more effective at managing the difficulties associated with operating a media organization. This highlights the powerful stereotypes that women encounter in the media. In order to assist women in the field of journalism, media companies must implement strategies that address gender discrimination, provide guidance through mentorship, and cultivate supportive atmospheres where women can thrive at every level.

- **Women's Roles in Political Leadership**

Bangladesh has experienced both progress and opposition when it comes to the participation of women in political affairs. By February 2024, women occupied 20.9% of positions in the national parliament, a considerable representation when compared to other countries in South Asia (UN Women, 2024). In Bangladesh, men predominantly hold leadership positions. A common perception is that men excel as leaders, creating barriers for women to engage fully in the political arena. A 2024 survey revealed that 69% of respondents viewed men as possessing superior leadership skills, while 88% felt men were more effective at managing businesses.

- **Promoting Gender Diversity in Academia and Professional Fields**

Bangladesh has seen advancements in gender equality within higher education and the workforce, yet challenges remain. Female student enrollment surpasses that of male students at many universities, particularly in disciplines like education, health, and social sciences. Still, there is a scarcity of women working in technical and scientific areas. Despite efforts from the government and NGOs to increase female participation, women remain underrepresented in fields such as engineering, computer science, and technology.

2.6 Global Female Leaders

- **Indra Nooyi**

Hailing from Chennai, India, Indra Nooyi transcended both cultural and professional challenges to become one of the world's most powerful women in business. Following her graduation from esteemed institutions such as Yale, she joined PepsiCo in 1994 and rose to the position of CEO in 2006. As the first immigrant woman of color, she took the helm of a Fortune 50 company, breaking new ground. In her role as CEO, she championed the concept of "Performance with Purpose," steering PepsiCo towards a dual focus on generating profit and promoting healthier products, environmental stewardship, and equitable leadership practices. Her leadership led to a notable increase in PepsiCo's sales, prompting the company to diversify its product range by providing healthier choices in addition to soft drinks.

Nooyi's influence shattered limits and motivated a fresh cohort of women to aim for higher aspirations. Her journey reveals that with a clear aim, education, and effort, women have the potential to transform the world—impacting both business and society as a whole.

- **Oprah Winfrey**

In 1954, Oprah Winfrey entered the world in a small community located in Mississippi. Despite facing a difficult upbringing and growing up in poverty, she persevered and emerged as a key figure in the media industry. Starting her career as a local news anchor, she navigated numerous obstacles in a predominantly male-dominated industry. The Oprah Winfrey Show, which she began in 1986, eventually became the most beloved talk show of all time. In addition to her television career, Oprah founded a significant media company known as Harpo Productions, making her the first Black woman to reach a billion-dollar net worth. Alongside her television projects, Oprah established Harpo Productions, becoming the first Black woman to achieve billionaire status. Beyond her roles on television, Oprah launched her own media firm, Harpo Productions, and became the first Black woman to attain a billion-dollar fortune. She has always directed her leadership efforts toward assisting individuals by championing education, reading, and the rights of women. She has worked on many charitable projects, like the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa.

The narrative of Oprah emphasizes that with resilience, self-honesty, and a defined purpose, women can lead effectively while maintaining kindness. Women around the globe are still inspired by her legacy to assert their voices and act with intention.

- **Rima Sultana Rimu**

The birth of Rima Sultana Rimu took place in 2002 in Ramu, a region in Bangladesh. Her passion for women's rights is evident as she also dedicates herself to fostering peace. She participated in the Young Women Leaders for Peace program, which is a segment of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP). Rima commenced his support efforts in the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox's Bazar in 2018. She committed herself to creating educational resources for children excluded from standard school environments. She assisted in designing reading and math curricula specifically for Rohingya children. This issue was crucial since 50% of the kids under 12 residing in the Balukhali camp had not received any formal education. Rima not only taught but also worked to enhance mutual understanding between refugees and the local community through dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

Rima discusses significant issues impacting women, including child marriage, the practice of dowries, and domestic violence. Utilizing platforms like radio and theater, she finds artistic approaches to make these issues clearer to others. Her relentless efforts earned her a spot on the BBC's 100 Women list in 2020, encouraging young women in Bangladesh and elsewhere to create change in their communities.

- **Ursula von der Leyen**

In 1958, Ursula von der Leyen came into the world in Brussels. As a politician from Germany, she balances her career as a doctor while raising seven children. She began her political journey in her 40s after obtaining degrees in economics and medicine. Rising through the ranks of Germany's government, she made history as the first woman to hold the position of Minister of Defence from 2013 to 2019. While serving, she prioritized efforts to reform the military and advance gender equity in the armed services. Ursula broke new ground in 2019 by assuming the position of the first woman President of the European Commission, a key role in international politics. She has spearheaded initiatives to tackle climate change through the European Green

Deal, enhance technology, and manage significant issues such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The journey of Ursula von der Leyen highlights the impact that resolute and principled leadership can have in driving important reforms. Through her demonstration of both talent and compassion, she has facilitated greater access for women to attain leadership positions in European and global politics.

- **MacKenzie Scott**

Born in California in 1970, MacKenzie Scott is a notable author and philanthropist recognized as one of the leading female figures in global charitable efforts. Upon completing her studies at Princeton, she started working at Amazon in its early days, playing a key role in its achievements. Following her divorce from Jeff Bezos in 2019, she received a significant portion of Amazon shares and chose to invest her wealth into societal improvement. Scott evolved into a significant benefactor for philanthropic endeavors, giving more than \$16 billion to groups addressing issues such as racial justice, gender equality, healthcare access, educational opportunities, and financial upliftment, often with no stipulations. Her transparent and reliable approach to charitable giving has transformed the way individuals contribute today.

By demonstrating a calm yet powerful leadership style, MacKenzie Scott has reshaped our financial practices aimed at instigating meaningful change in the community. She exemplifies how female leaders can reshape our understanding of power through their emphasis on compassion, justice, and reliability.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research collects data through numerical analysis and surveys conducted with individuals. According to Kurt Lewin, German-American social psychologist, "No research without action, no action without research." The study integrates statistical data with insights gathered from conversations with individuals. This investigation utilizes both numerical data and personal interactions to gather comprehensive information. To comprehend the results, analyses of both

exploratory and confirmatory nature have been performed. We have selected 100 random representatives from different industries from all over Bangladesh to conduct the survey. And the survey has been completed by using random sampling techniques. The data was sourced from government publications, NGOs, and academic research papers. One to one conversation with female leaders from diverse fields such as business, political arenas, and community organizations had been done.

3.2 Data Collection

In this research, Data collection is the foremost task to do. In this research, data has been collected through two different methods. They are-

1. Primary data
2. Secondary data

The following factors have been considered regarding primary data and secondary data:

Primary Data:

Primary records consist of data collected firsthand by researchers through methods such as surveys, research or interviews conducted with primary sources. Considering the lookup project, it is obtained directly from primary sources like Google. This study involved accumulating primary information using a series of questions in a survey format. Surveys involving 100 professionals were conducted, alongside conversations with HR managers and individuals responsible for policy decisions.

Secondary Data:

This is relevant to documents obtained by a person who is not an employee. Information categorized as secondary sources comes from surveys, governmental data, organizational records, and previously collected information intended for other research efforts. This type of information is more affordable and accessible compared to crucial facts, and it remains available even when the primary data is missing. This research involved the compilation of information from:

- ✓ Newspapers
- ✓ Journals
- ✓ Other relevant research papers
- ✓ Websites
- ✓ Project papers
- ✓ Reports from BBS, ILO, World Economic Forum, and scholarly articles

Research Design: Exploratory research

Research Method: Surveyed and interviewed by experts from various fields.

Research Instrument: Structured questionnaire

Questionnaires

Please (✓) into the following information.

Part I: Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Others
2. Age: ☐ 20 - 30 years ☐ 31 - 40 years ☐ 41 years - 50 years ☐ 51+ years
3. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Others
4. Education Level: ☐ Diploma ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ Doctorate
5. Industry: ☐ Banking/Finance ☐ Garments/Textile ☐ Telecom/IT ☐
Agriculture/Fishing ☐ NGO/Development ☐ Food/Health ☐ Teaching/Academic
☐ Others
6. Sector: ☐ Public ☐ Private
7. Current Job Level: ☐ Entry-level ☐ Mid-level Manager ☐ Senior Manager ☐
Director/VP ☐ C-Level (CEO, CFO, etc.)

Part II: Please give your opinion on “Women’s Participation in Leadership Roles in Bangladesh.” (Select all that apply)

8. What are the biggest barriers for women advancing to leadership in your company?
 - a. ☐ Workplace bias/stereotypes
 - b. ☐ Lack of mentorship/sponsorship
 - c. ☐ Work-life balance challenges

- d. ☐ Gender pay gap
 - e. ☐ Cultural and societal pressures
 - f. ☐ Other
9. Which initiatives does your company provide to support female leaders?
- a. ☐ Leadership training programs
 - b. ☐ Flexible work arrangements
 - c. ☐ Maternity/paternity leave policies
 - d. ☐ Mentorship programs for women
 - e. ☐ None of the above
10. What advice do you have for aspiring women leaders?

Answer:

Part III: Please give your opinion on the following practices in your organization on a scale of 1 to 5. (Here, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, & 5 = Strongly Agree.)

Women's Participation in Leadership Roles						
11 .	Women have equal opportunities for leadership roles in my organization.	1	2	3	4	5
12 .	There are clear policies in place to promote gender diversity in leadership in my organization.	1	2	3	4	5
13 .	Workplace biases negatively impact women's leadership progression.	1	2	3	4	5
14 .	Women in leadership roles receive the same level of respect as men.	1	2	3	4	5
15 .	My organization provides mentorship programs for female employees aspiring to leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
16 .	Work-life balance is a major challenge for women in leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
17 .	There is adequate networking support available for women in leadership roles.	1	2	3	4	5
18 .	HR policies are effectively implemented to support women's leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
19 .	Cultural expectations hinder women's career progression in leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
20 .	More initiatives are needed to promote women's participation in leadership roles.	1	2	3	4	5

3.3 Sampling

The study adopts a random sampling technique, which allows every person to have an equal probability of being selected for participation. Data is collected from various sectors in

Bangladesh to provide a comprehensive picture of women's leadership. Statistical techniques helped to uncover patterns and challenges.

Sample Size: 103

Sample Area: Bangladesh

Sampling Method: Simple Random Sampling

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Statistical analysis using Google Analytics.

Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis of interview responses.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Demographic Factor Analysis

Demographic analysis provides valuable information about the survey participants, enriching our understanding of their backgrounds and attitudes towards women's leadership. Significant aspects including gender, age, level of education, job stability, and work history are examined. These elements play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and emotions regarding leadership opportunities in Bangladesh. This analysis yields significant foundational knowledge that aids in comprehending the broader findings of the research.

Gender Distribution: The majority of respondents are men, representing 51.8% of the group of the total, while women make up 41.7%. This indicates that the number of men and women is roughly equal, with a slight excess of men.

Age Group: The analysis of age reveals that a large number of participants are in the early to middle stages of their professional lives. Those aged 20 to 30 form the predominant group, representing 51.5% of the total. With 34% representation, the 31 to 40 age group is the second largest cohort. People aged 41 to 50 make up 13.6% of the group, while just 1% are 51 years old or older. This indicates that the majority of the workforce consists of young individuals, with over 85% being 40 years old or younger.

Marital Status: Most of the participants (61.2%) are married, and 38.8% are single. This implies that a large portion of those surveyed likely face family responsibilities that

shape their job selection, stability expectations, and the way they juggle work with their personal lives.

Education Level: Those who were surveyed have attained a considerable level of education. The majority of individuals, approximately 66%, hold a master's degree, while 32% possess a bachelor's degree. Also, a doctorate degree is held by 1.9% of the individuals participating in the survey. The findings suggest that the examined group is highly educated, which probably correlates with their skills and roles in professional environments.

Professional Industry Affiliation: Those who provided responses originate from multiple fields, demonstrating a mix of different sectors. The most common industries are Banking and Finance (17.5%), Non-Governmental Organizations and Development (15.5%), Clothing and Textiles (13.6%), and Telecom and IT (10.7%). Other areas like Teaching and Education (9.7%) and Food and Health (4.9%) are also included. Interestingly, 28.2% of the participants work in "Other" industries, showing that there are many different job areas beyond the usual ones.

Professional Industry:
103 responses

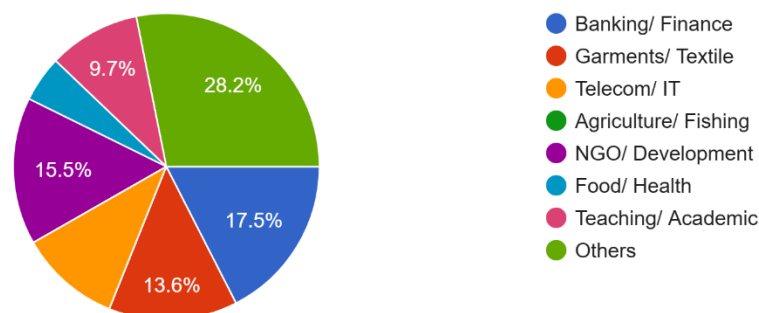


Figure 3: "Professional Industry Affiliation" Survey Findings

Employment Sector: Most of the people surveyed (86.4%) have jobs in the private sector, while only 13.6% work in the public sector. This demonstrates that a substantial number of the individuals polled hold positions in the private sector.

Current Job Level: Most people surveyed are at the middle level of their jobs (49.5%), which shows that many are currently working their way up in their careers. Entry-level workers are 29.1% of the group, and senior managers are 18.4%. A small number of

people hold high executive jobs, with 1.9% being Directors or Vice Presidents and 1% being in top positions like CEO or CFO. This indicates that the majority of individuals are at the beginning to intermediate phases of their careers, with only a small number occupying top executive roles.

4.2 Core Survey Content Analysis

This section of the survey can explore primary research objectives, such as public opinions on a particular subject or behaviors related to a specific practice. The involvement of women in leadership roles is vital for advancing gender equality and fair employment standards in Bangladesh. This portion focuses on the significant discoveries from a survey that investigates sentiments regarding women in workplace leadership, the barriers they confront, and the support mechanisms that exist. The insights outline the struggles women deal with in career advancement, the initiatives organizations pursue to aid them, and the recommendations shared with women seeking to become leaders in their respective jobs.

Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership: Several barriers have been identified that hinder women's advancement to leadership roles within their organizations. The biggest problem mentioned is balancing work and personal life, chosen by 54.4% of the people surveyed. This highlights the persistent challenges women encounter in juggling their careers with personal and family obligations, especially in the absence of sufficient support.

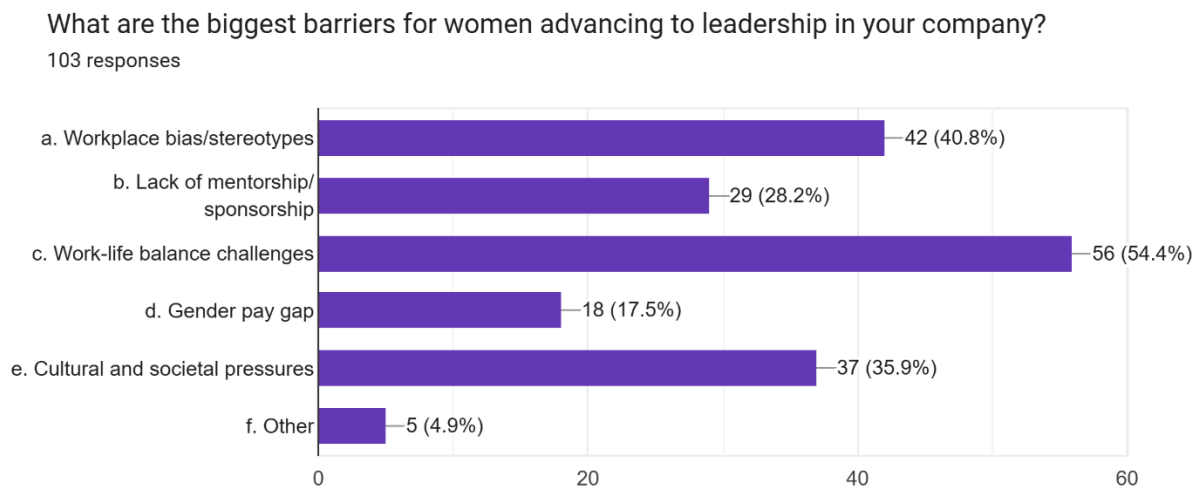


Figure 4: “Barriers to Women’s Advancement in Leadership” Survey Findings

The second biggest problem noted is workplace bias and stereotypes (40.8%). This reflects that persistent gender beliefs continue to obstruct the recognition of women as capable leaders. After that, 35.9% of people noticed that cultural and social pressures still affect women's career choices, showing that traditional expectations and norms are still important.

A significant 28.2% of women reported that they lack adequate sponsorship or mentorship. This implies that many women do not have access to the resources and backing essential for career advancement. The gender pay gap is at 17.5%. While this figure is smaller compared to certain other concerns, it remains a significant issue. Only 4.9% chose "Others," showing that the barriers listed cover most of the respondents' concerns.

Company Initiatives Supporting Female Leadership: Survey results show that the most common efforts companies offer are flexible work options and maternity/paternity leave, which were chosen by 56.3% of people surveyed. These initiatives aid in achieving harmony between professional and personal aspects, reflecting the key challenges that are mentioned earlier.

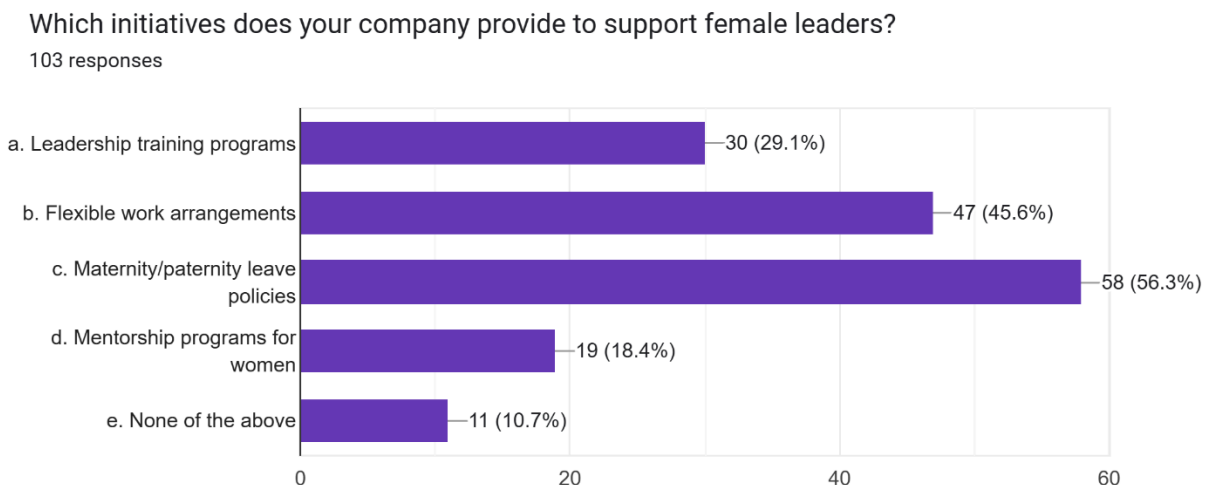


Figure 5: "Company Initiatives Supporting Female Leadership" Survey Findings

Only 29.1% of people said there are leadership training programs, and even fewer, just 18.4%, noted that there are mentorship programs for women. The limited figures could clarify the lack of mentoring and leadership training, which poses a significant issue. It's concerning that 10.7% of people said their company doesn't provide any of the programs mentioned. This indicates that certain workplaces require enhanced assistance from their organizations.

Advice for Aspiring Women Leaders: In this portion of the survey, the third question encouraged respondents to provide advice for women seeking leadership roles. A key takeaway was the significance of self-confidence, self-belief, and emotional resilience. It's been noted by many that the essence of leadership lies in having faith in oneself, along with a humble and determined attitude. Women received encouragement to remain optimistic, take on challenges, and strengthen their mental resolve to deal with the bias and societal constraints that frequently deter them from becoming leaders.

A crucial aspect of the advice was the importance of mentorship and the pursuit of ongoing learning. Many highlighted the importance of reaching out to mentors, cultivating robust working relationships, and looking for avenues to improve leadership competencies. Developing essential skills such as decision-making, effective communication, and strategic thinking was crucial. Moreover, people urged women to express their views, articulate their concepts in a professional setting, and resist stereotypes through active participation and confidence.

A key aspect to keep in mind is seeking opportunities for growth in your role while managing your personal tasks. There are many recommendations for women pursuing leadership careers to capitalize on flexible work options, hone their time management skills, and seek assistance from their community to enhance their chances of success. The value of lifelong education is often stressed. It involves staying current with knowledge, engaging in lifelong learning, and cultivating emotional intelligence. In summary, the responses reflect a comprehensive leadership approach that encompasses developing personal resilience, enhancing professional skills, and a firm commitment to addressing gender obstacles in the workplace in Bangladesh.

4.3 Final Opinion Analysis

In the final section of the survey, participants were invited to express their agreement with several statements about their organization regarding the survey topic. A scale of 1 to 5 was employed, where 1 represents strong disagreement and 5 denotes strong agreement. The outcomes illustrate differing viewpoints, highlighting that certain people are hopeful, whereas others are apprehensive about equitable treatment for both genders in leadership roles within diverse organizations.

Women have equal opportunities for leadership roles: According to the study, 33% of respondents feel that their workplaces do not afford women the same chances to attain leadership positions, pointing to an ongoing challenge. About 27.2% and 23.3% of the people surveyed gave a score of 4 and 5 to the statement, which means that almost half of them think their organizations provide fair opportunities. The data reveals that,

despite advancements in women's inclusion in leadership, many people still assert that concrete measures, policy changes, and cultural shifts are essential for achieving genuine equality between genders in leadership.

Clear policies in place to promote gender diversity in leadership: Generally, the statement received a positive response from people, but there are certain worries present. A total of 54.4% of people said they agree with the statement, with 33% giving it a score of 4 and 21.4% giving it a score of 5. This reveals that a majority of participants believe their organizations have a partial commitment to advancing gender diversity within leadership. However, 29.5% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed (with scores of 1 and 2), and 15.5% were neutral. This implies that while some organizations do have policies in place, these may not be clearly conveyed, uniformly adhered to, or viewed as advantageous by numerous team members. The evidence reveals that promoting gender diversity in organizations requires enhanced openness and a stronger sense of responsibility.

There are clear policies in place to promote gender diversity in leadership in my organization.
103 responses

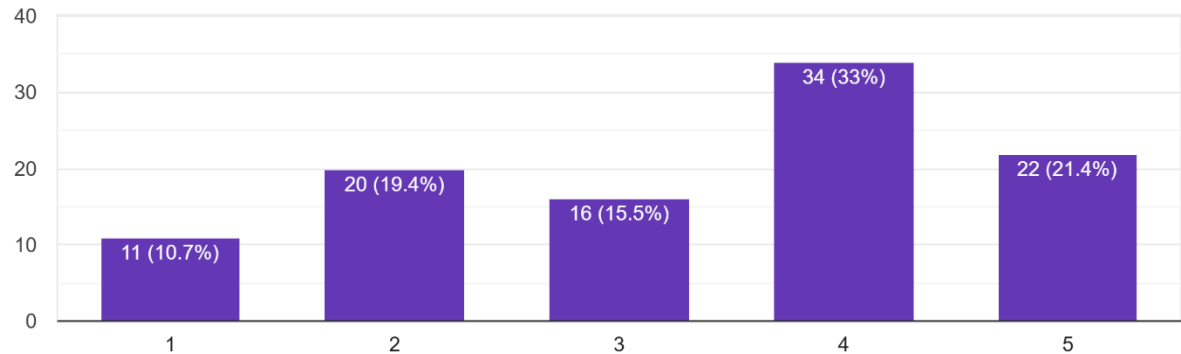


Figure 6: “Clear policies in place to promote gender diversity in leadership” Survey Findings

Workplace biases negatively impact women's leadership progression: The responses to this statement indicate that a significant number of individuals believe that both concealed and overt biases continue to influence the workplace. A notable 72.9% of people said yes or really yes to the statement. Among them, 37.9% chose 4, and 35% chose 5. The majority of people believe that while some companies implement diversity initiatives, the prevailing workplace culture still hinders women's advancement in their professional paths. Only a small number of people (5.8%) strongly disagreed, and

another 15.5% disagreed a little. Meanwhile, 5.8% had no opinion. These observations highlight that many workers still perceive or experience bias that obstructs women's progression to leadership roles.

Women in leadership roles receive the same level of respect as men: The statement reveals a complex and somewhat concerning scenario. Almost half of the people surveyed (48.6%) said they disagreed or strongly disagreed (gave ratings of 1 and 2). Among them, 37.9% gave a rating of 2, and 10.7% gave a rating of 1. This indicates that nearly half of individuals believe there is a disparity in the respect afforded to male and female leaders within their organizations. Only 14.6% said they really believe respect is equal, while 25.2% agreed and 11.7% had no opinion. These statistics underscore a key problem concerning societal views on gender representation in leadership at the workplace. It is evident that cultural stereotypes are still present, potentially eroding women's trustworthiness as leaders, even when they occupy prestigious positions.

Women in leadership roles receive the same level of respect as men.

103 responses

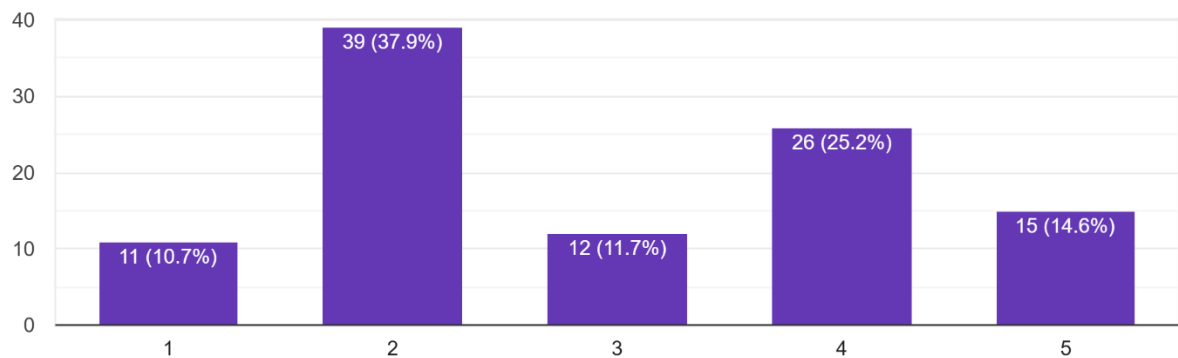


Figure 7: “Women in leadership roles receive the same level of respect as men” Survey Findings

Organization provides mentorship programs for female employees aspiring to leadership: Reactions to this assertion reveal that the organization does not provide consistent backing. While 15.5% of people strongly agreed and 22.3% agreed (making a total of 37.8%), almost the same number, 45.6%, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. A large number of organizations either don't have mentorship programs or their programs are not very noticeable or helpful, as shown by the high disagreement rates (23.3% rated it a 1 and 22.3% rated it a 2). Also, 26.5% of the people surveyed

chose the middle option, which shows that they might be unsure or not know if these programs are available or how easy it is for employees to use them.

Work-life balance is a major challenge for women in leadership: A clear finding came from the strong agreement with the statement, with a total of 73.7% of people choosing 4 (25.2%) or 5 (48.5%). Many women find themselves under considerable stress to harmonize their professional leadership roles with their domestic and personal responsibilities. Many people (4.9%) firmly reject the idea, acknowledging that this challenge manifests in diverse work environments.

Adequate networking support available for women in leadership roles: The data concerning support for female leaders showed a lack of positivity. Out of the people who answered, 37.9% agreed or strongly agreed, while another 37.9% Additionally, 24.3% had no strong opinion either way. These outcomes reveal insufficient support systems for women professionally, which could impede their ability to secure critical leadership roles and guidance.

There is adequate networking support available for women in leadership roles.
103 responses

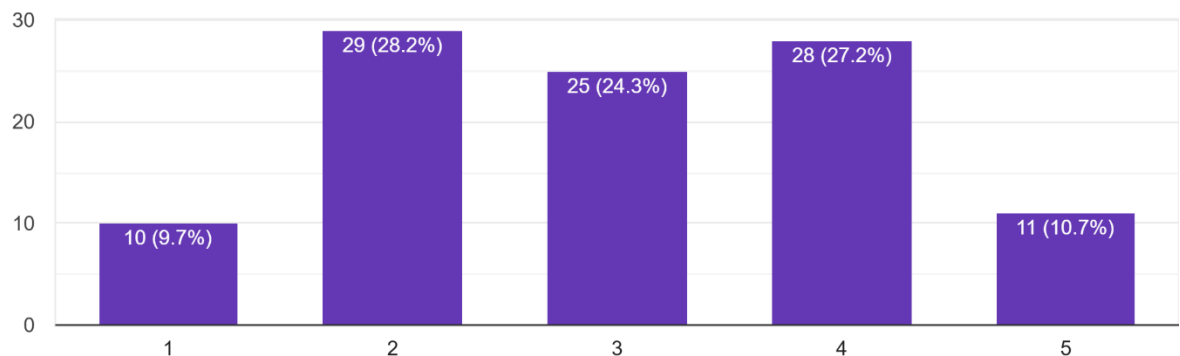


Figure 8: “Adequate networking support available for women in leadership roles” Survey Findings

HR policies are effectively implemented to support women’s leadership: While many are feeling a sense of optimism, they are also being prudent about the role of HR policies in supporting women in leadership. Out of the people asked, 50.5% said they agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (15.5%) that the policies were put into action well. However, a large 29.1% disagreed, and 19.4% were neutral. This highlights that although there are established plans, individuals believe they are not being implemented consistently. It

emphasizes the importance of transforming policies into tangible, quantifiable outcomes.

Cultural expectations hinder women's career progression in leadership: The influence of cultural factors was another major issue of concern. About 70% of participants expressed agreement or strong agreement with the notion that cultural expectations impede women's rise to leadership roles. Specifically, 39.8% rated it as 4, and 30.1% rated it as 5. This illustrates that, beyond organizational guidelines, extensive social frameworks and expectations pose major barriers for women seeking to advance into leadership positions. This affects how people see women's abilities, their roles in decision-making, and how accepted they are as leaders.

More initiatives are needed to promote women's participation in leadership roles: Ultimately, there was a consensus that greater efforts are necessary to support women in attaining leadership roles. A notable 79.6% of people chose either 4 (35.9%) or 5 (43.7%), showing there is a strong need for more actions at the organizational and policy levels. These results demonstrate that many believe, despite some improvements, there are still considerable shortcomings in establishing equal opportunities for women to take on leadership positions in the workplace.

More initiatives are needed to promote women's participation in leadership roles.
103 responses

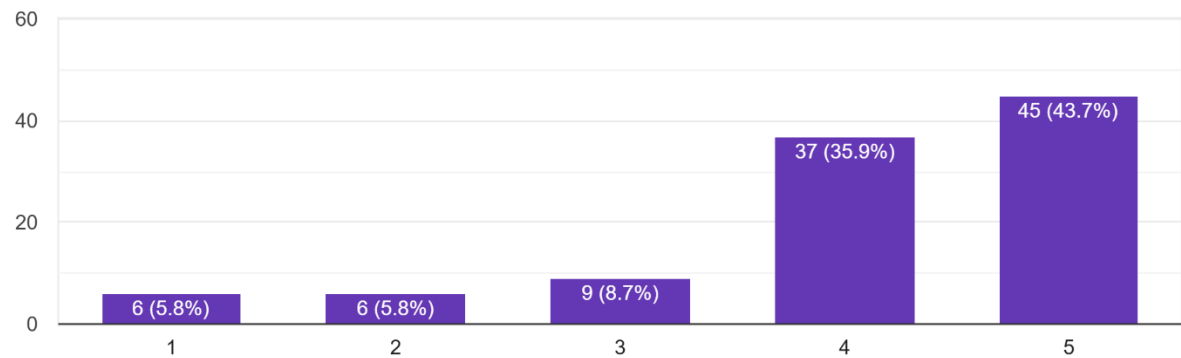


Figure 9: “More initiatives are needed to promote women’s participation in leadership roles”
Survey Findings

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

According to the survey results, advancements have been achieved in supporting women as leaders in organizations, yet significant obstacles remain. Achieving career advancement is hindered for women by the difficulties of balancing personal and professional lives, cultural norms, and inequitable treatment in the workplace. It is often stated by many that women are still not accorded the same respect as men when it comes to leadership roles. Although some policies promoting gender diversity exist and HR is available to assist, they aren't consistently enforced, and there is a lack of mentorship and networking opportunities. The evidence strongly indicates that we require targeted initiatives and cultural shifts to ensure women's participation and success in leadership positions.

The results suggest that more individuals are acknowledging and acting on the issue of providing equal opportunities for women in leadership. This implies that staff members are more informed about the aspects that influence women's advancement in their careers. Several voices offered insights into how organizations could aid women in their journey to leadership positions. They emphasized the value of being emotionally intelligent, having confidence in oneself, and consistently seeking to learn new skills. The findings of the survey indicated that a large portion of respondents wishes for their organizations to increase efforts in promoting support for women, both through formal policies and in their everyday work environments. A shift in mindset among many professionals opens up significant opportunities for transformation. To cultivate inclusive leadership, we should provide steady support, beneficial development resources, and leadership styles that recognize and honor different viewpoints and backgrounds.

5.2 Policy and Organizational Recommendations

To empower more women to step into leadership roles and thrive, it is essential for organizations to adopt a range of approaches and actively engage in initiatives. They need to address not only the rules that hinder women's progress but also the mindsets that may impede their advancement. First, clear rules about gender diversity need to be created and shared with everyone in the organization. It's essential for these policies to provide real value rather than merely appearing impressive. Clear targets, accountability methods, and deadlines must be established to guarantee the authentic representation of women in leadership roles.

Secondly, organizations should create organized mentorship and support programs just for women. These efforts can equip women with valuable resources, elevate their self-esteem, and aid in nurturing strong leadership among females. Simultaneously, offering tailored training courses for leaders along with diversity-focused workshops can prepare women for top positions and confront underlying biases among staff.

Regular implementation of flexible work choices and beneficial parental leave policies should be the norm for everyone, not just women. This can alleviate the negative emotions that are frequently aimed at women managing both their professional and personal responsibilities. Companies must foster an inclusive workplace environment for all employees. This indicates that they need to challenge gender stereotypes, respect all leaders irrespective of their gender, and promote open dialogues about equity and inclusion. In conclusion, consistent evaluations and feedback must be established to track advancements and refine strategies using the insights obtained. This will enable the organization to cultivate a more inclusive and nurturing atmosphere for all members.

5.3 Future Research Directions

This analysis delivers significant information about the views on women's leadership in Bangladesh as well as the challenges they must overcome. To fully grasp these concerns and formulate successful strategies, further research is crucial. Future studies might examine the impact of corporate policies on the long-term career advancement of women. This analysis involves assessing how elements like mentorship schemes, adaptable work schedules, and leadership development contribute to meaningful results.

Examining various sectors in depth would be beneficial, as the obstacles and opportunities for women can vary significantly across industries such as finance, fashion, education, and technology. Engaging in in-depth interviews or group discussions with women leaders allows us to gain insight into their distinctive experiences and narratives, enriching our comprehension of their viewpoints.

There is potential for future studies to examine how men who champion women and organizational leaders can contribute to promoting inclusive practices. They may analyze how attitudes toward gender equality vary across generations. Exploring the distinctions between private and public sectors or between urban and rural organizations can yield important insights. These methods will not only enhance academic discourse but also generate valuable insights for fostering equitable and inclusive leadership.

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