



# Analysing Women's Empowerment Within The Corporate Setting

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**Citation:** Mr. Manish Kumar Tiwari, et al. (2024), Analysing Women's Empowerment Within The Corporate Setting, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11), 1653-1662

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i11.9743

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

A definition proposed for women's empowerment is the following: "empowering women to promote their own sense of self-worth, autonomy in decision-making, and the right to influence social change for themselves and others." Companies all over the globe have launched Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes in an effort to promote gender equality in the workplace, having acknowledged the contributions women make. We must examine these initiatives, which are praiseworthy, from the eyes of the women who will be most impacted by them: those working in corporate America. A total of 50 working-age females from the corporate sector in the state of Uttar Pradesh were surveyed for this study. The participants were selected using easy selection procedures. Although many respondents mentioned programmes that encouraged women's empowerment at work, the results show that many of them did not gain from these programmes on a personal level. The importance of companies going beyond tokenistic approaches and embracing holistic initiatives that question established conventions and practices is highlighted by these findings. As crucial drivers in bringing about real change, the study highlights the necessity of genuine dedication and transformative methods. Ultimately, this research highlights how important it is for companies to prioritise gender diversity in leadership positions, provide equal opportunities to all employees, promote work-life balance, and cultivate an inclusive corporate culture if they want to see significant empowerment initiatives for women. Another way this study adds to what is already known about women's empowerment is by shedding light on this topic. Organisations may now craft effective CSR programmes that advance gender parity in the workplace by using the data and insights provided by this study. This paper examines the data on both sides of the relationship between empowerment and growth. It first demonstrates that poverty and lack of opportunity lead to inequality between men and women. Therefore, when economic development reduces poverty, the condition of women improves in two ways: first, when poverty is reduced, the condition of everyone, including women, improves; and second, as poverty declines, gender inequality declines, so the condition of women improves more than that of men with development. However, economic development alone is insufficient to achieve perfect equality between men and women. In order to attain gender equality, it is still required to take action on policies. If the empowering of women also leads to further growth, this would create a virtuous cycle, and such a governmental measure would be clearly justified. This essay argues that empowering women does certainly influence society's choices in crucial ways, yet the common portrayal of women as always making the best decisions for long-term development is somewhat exaggerated. The conclusion here is that the possibility for women's empowerment and economic development to mutually support each other is more balanced and slightly more pessimistic than the picture that is presented by the more strident voices on either side of the argument.

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**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR Initiatives

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## 1. Introduction

Women's empowerment is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been the subject of much research and debate. It is the "Process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices." (European Institute for Gender Equality). However, the term empowerment has different meanings in different contexts - social, economic, educational, political and psychological. (R. Uma Devi)

The history of women's empowerment is a long and complicated one, woven into an intricate web of struggles and achievements. Women have been fighting for their rights from as far back as the 19th century which saw the rise of the women's suffrage movement. Empowerment of women is a journey that began centuries ago and remains to be ongoing. While remarkable progress has been made, there is much to achieve for women to feel completely empowered.

Throughout history, women have had to face numerous forms of discrimination due to deeply rooted gender prejudices and unequal power dynamics. From being denied equal political representation to having restricted access to healthcare and education, women have had to endure it all. The movements in the 19th century inspired many women to continue the struggle till their goals are achieved and demands are met. More than simply being a question of basic human rights, the need for women's empowerment has brought to light a plethora of issues that need to be addressed besides receiving equal pay and equal voting rights. Women's empowerment struggles have paved the way for momentous advancements in gender equality in all spheres of life. In recent years, there has been a significant paradigm shift in the corporate world towards advocating gender equality and empowering women. Women's empowerment has gotten a lot of attention across the globe, with big corporations increasingly viewing gender equality as an impetus for greater economic development.

Consequently, corporations everywhere are now recognizing the value that women bring to the table, and hence are taking specific measures to support and uplift women in the workplace. While the initiatives taken by corporations are commendable, the drawbacks and shortcomings must be analyzed along with the motive of such initiatives. Is it just for the empowerment of women or does it have other benefits to corporations too?

The purpose of this research paper is to analyse the nuances of women's empowerment within the corporate setting and understand how well corporate initiatives correspond with the broader goals of attaining gender equality. By diving into the different facets of women's empowerment, taking into account economic, social, and political aspects, the paper aims to assess the motive whether these activities unknowingly promote present power dynamics or propagate neoliberal ideals that emphasise market-driven success over broader social reform, and the efficiency of corporate-led initiatives that aim to address gender disparity in the workplace. (J. Sridevi). Furthermore, the research seeks to shed light on potential limitations in corporate-led women's empowerment efforts. The unequal treatment of women in the household may be partly due to the fact that they have less opportunities in the labour market. Parents have lesser expectations for their daughters than for their males, and teenagers themselves have lower expectations. For instance, in West Bengal, Beaman et al. (2011) discovered that in areas where no woman had ever been the local leader, 86% of parents wanted their daughters to be housewives or to do whatever their in-laws decided for them. In contrast, the percentage of boys whose parents wanted them to be housewives or to do whatever their in-laws decided for them was less than 1%.

If women do not work outside the home, people may think that they do not need to be as strong and healthy and that they do not need a formal education. Interviews of parents in five states in northern India were done for the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) in India.

According to the PROBE Team (1999), as many as 10 percent of them thought that girls did not need to be educated, while just 1 percent of them thought the same about guys. Fifty-seven percent wanted their boys to study "as far as possible," whereas only 28 percent desired the same for their daughters. A lot of parents thought that it was not important to educate girls because they were just expected to get married and take care of their homes. In the Beaman et al. (2011) research, 32% of parents said they wanted their teenage boys to graduate from secondary school or college, whereas only 18% said they wanted the same for their teenage daughters.

If one of the reasons for educating children is to improve their chances of getting a job, then making the job market better for women would be a significant reason for treating women better. Economic progress results in a shift in the type of labour that is more favourable to women. Between 1930 and 1950, the need for clerical workers in the United States increased, which led to a greater number of available positions.

of employment that respectable women could keep after getting married (Goldin, 2006). More recently, this has occurred not just in China and Mexico, where factory work acceptable for women has increased, but also in India, where service jobs have increased owing to outsourcing.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Empowerment is when those who have less power gain more influence over resources and ideas. It has been linked to words like autonomy, power, position, and agency. The Indian constitution has made it very clear that women have equal rights and has instructed authorities to create rules and regulations to protect those rights. However, feminist scholars in the 1970s took a radical approach to challenge patriarchy by transforming power relations in favour of women's rights and gender equality. This continued in the 1980s (Batliwala, 1993, 2007) and became an individual process of self-transformation in the 1990s (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; Sen, 1997). They emphasise the complicated relationship that exists between women's self-understanding (Kabeer, 1994) and their ability to express themselves (Sen, 1997), as well as women's access to and control over material resources. The capacity to recognise and make use of resources is just as important for women as having access to them, according to Kabeer (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002). The goal of empowerment, according to Kabeer, is to have control over one's own life and one's family's decisions, but it may also be a means to an end for instance, getting a degree is one status, finding a job is another, and so on. The capacity to succeed is the ultimate goal of empowerment, while obtaining an education can be a method to that aim as well. The Women Empowerment Matrix (Wieringa, 1994) was designed to illustrate the interconnections between gender issues and specific topics such as health, education, and women's labour, as well as to chart the overall state of gender issues on a national basis. Researchers can gain a better picture of the many manifestations of women's subordination and the depths to which they go by using the women empowerment matrix. Many more purposes, such as planning, policy analysis, and awareness-raising, can make use of the matrix.

Research on "Invisible Workers, Visible Contribution - A Study of Home based Women Workers in Five Sectors across South Asia" was carried out by Bajaj (1999). Work from home is common in both urban and rural areas of Asia, according to his research, with India being a prime example. This line of work primarily features women. They often work from home as craftspeople, weavers, potters, bidi rollers, bakers, and garment manufacturers. Social exclusion, a lack of mobility, and gender discrimination have made things worse for home-based women workers.

The majority of these women who work from home are part of the economically disadvantaged lower class, and as a result, they have no social or legal protections, and this is a problem across South Asia, including India. Because they are not legally considered employees, home-based workers operate in complete secrecy and have no legal protections for their employment. To have a thorough picture of women's empowerment, it's necessary to look at it from multiple angles, considering different aspects of women's lives and their status (Rajeshwari, 2015). When women are given important political roles that allow them to use their full abilities and qualifications, economic development becomes unimaginable. There will be positive and equitable effects on the economy and politics as a whole when women have equal say. According to Endalcachew Bayeh (2016), if we want to see a lasting change in society and culture, we must first empower women in the home. The empowered women ought to have a say in who makes decisions. Power is the foundation upon which the idea of empowerment rests. Where it does not exist or is inadequate, it is degenerating. To empower women, one must ensure that they are financially secure, capable of taking care of themselves in any crisis, have high self-esteem so that they can overcome any obstacle, and able to take part in developmental initiatives (Hazarika, 2011). Research on women's status in the corporate sector, including their opportunities for development, involvement in employment, and wage equity, as well as the impact of this empowerment on the business sector as a whole.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Aim of the study

The purpose of this research is to examine women's empowerment in the context of corporations and to assess how well corporate initiatives work towards this end. The study also aims to identify possible constraints on corporate-led programmes to empower women in the workplace and to examine their efficacy.

### 3.2 Research Design

This research has no predetermined conclusions. This study aims to better comprehend a research question rather than offer definitive answers. It is common practice to conduct this kind of study in response to an open-ended research question so that researchers can better understand the topic at issue. All ethical norms were followed in this investigation. All participants' personal information was kept strictly confidential, and their informed consent was obtained before any data was collected. No third parties would have access to the data collected, and the article and the study did not include any personally identifiable information, such as names or images. All procedures were carried out in accordance with established ethical standards.

### 3.3 Sample

There were 42 participants in the study, all of whom were female. Convenience sampling was employed as the method of selection for the respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic Representation of the Respondents**

	Description	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	20-30	7	16.6
	31-40	7	16.6
	41-50	14	37.5
	51-60	8	21.9
	60+	6	12.5
Geographic Location	Noida	15	34.4
	Haryana	10	40.6
	Kanpur	07	18.8
The duration of employment within their organization. the	Less than 1 year	7	16.6
	3-5 years	9	21.4
	5-10 years	11	26.3
	10+ years	15	35.7
Mode of Working	Full-time Office	20	47.6
	Hybrid	22	52.4

### 3.4 Tools used

The survey was conducted via a structured questionnaire containing 18 questions.

How effectively do you think companies currently address women's empowerment through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives?

- a. Very effective
- b. Somewhat effective
- c. Not very effective
- d. Not at all effective
- e. I don't know

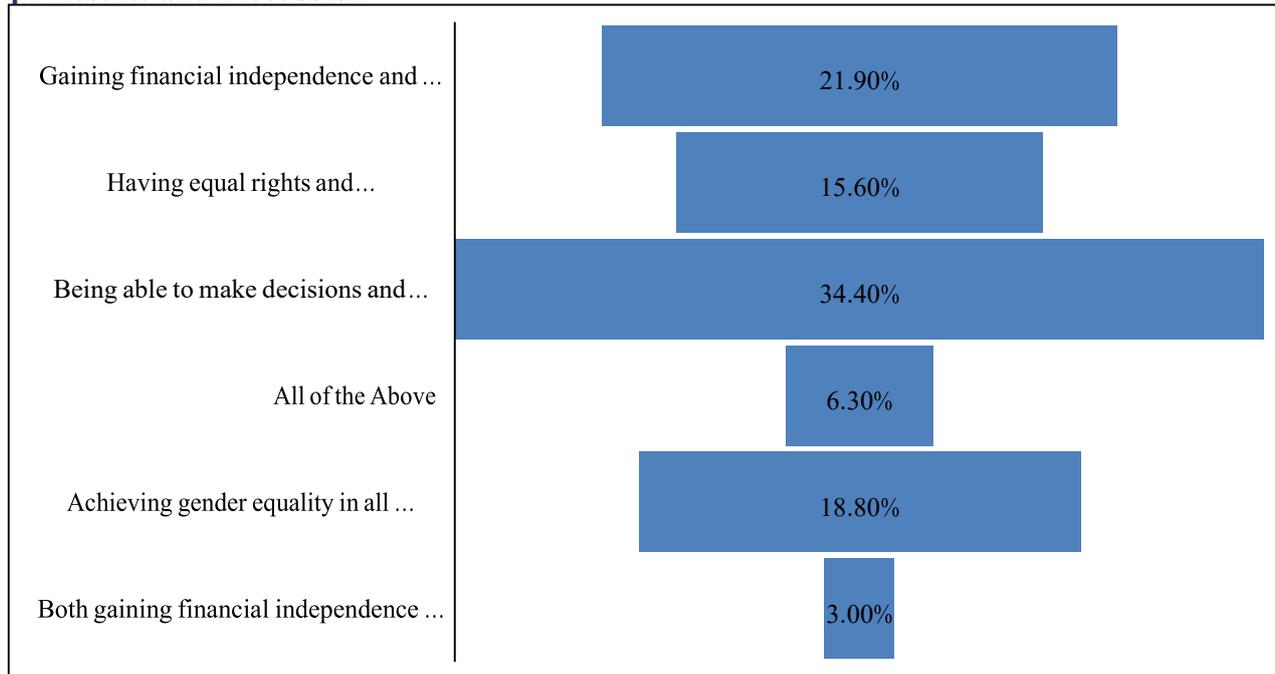
2. In your opinion, what are some of the key barriers to women's empowerment in society?

## 4 Data Collection

This research paper's data collection method made use of Google Forms, an easy-to-use but effective platform for collecting necessary information. Participants were given the opportunity to fill out the form, which was designed to gather crucial data for the study through a series of structured questions. A concise and understandable explanation was given to participants before the Google Form was distributed.

This introduction explained the purpose of the research and obtained their informed consent. A concise explanation of the confidentiality measures taken to protect the respondents' privacy was also included in this opening section. The Google Form was accessed by participants when they consented and made a decision to participate. For the purpose of collecting the required data in a structured and systematic way, the form contains multiple questions. Various aspects of the study problem were covered by the questionnaires, including demographics, opinions, behaviours, and any other pertinent traits.

#### 4.1 Results and Discussion



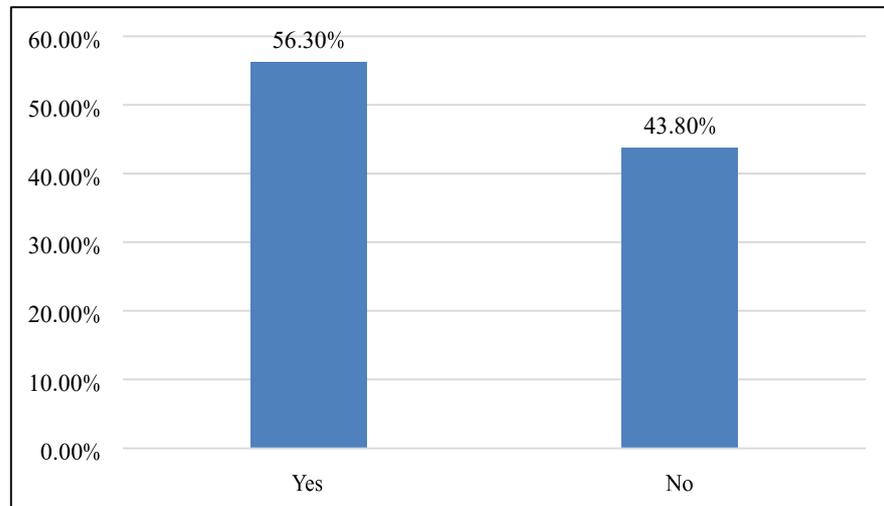
**Figure 1: Graphical Representation of What Women's Empowerment Means to the Respondents (N=42)**

As shown in the above figure 1, the ability to make judgements and choices without social restraints is defined as women's empowerment by 35.71% of respondents, or 15 people. Among the respondents, 21.9% or 9 people saw economic independence and freedom as a kind of women's empowerment, while 18.8% or 7 people see attaining gender equality in all areas as a form of women's empowerment. 15% respondents or 8 people think that women's empowerment means having the same rights and opportunities as men; 1% or 3 people think that it means both having financial independence and economic freedom and being able to make decisions and choices without societal restrictions; and two percent (3) think that it means all of the previous points. Further, from the collected data it is clear that 73.8% (31) of the respondents believe that society needs women's empowerment and 26.2% (11) believes that women's empowerment is not required by society.

**Table 2: Responses of respondents on why women's empowerment is needed by society**

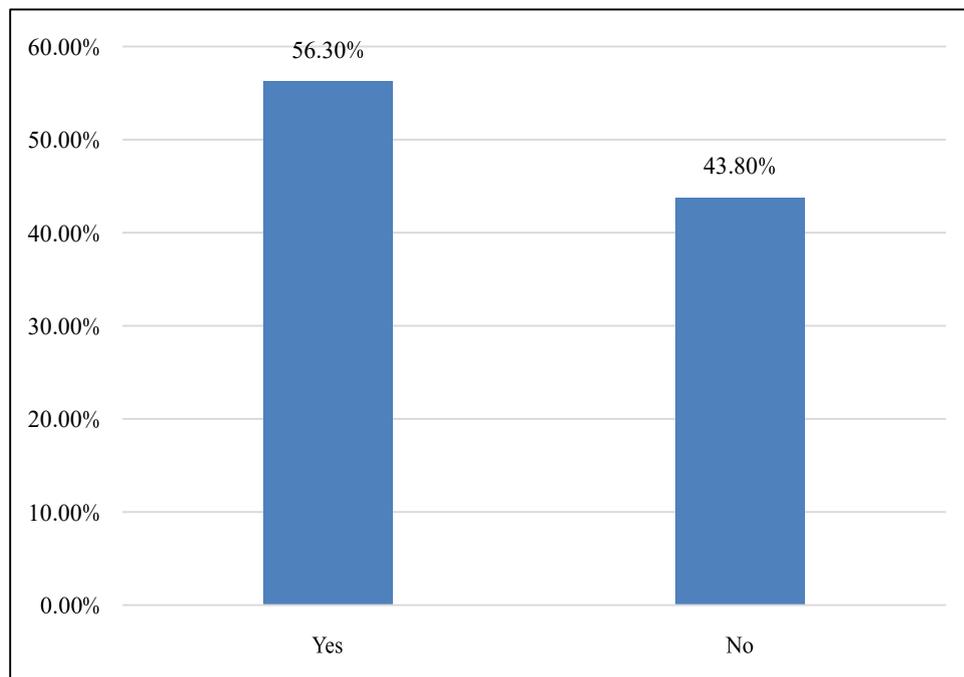
Yes, A lot of sectors still don't employ women and have a prejudice that men can do it better.
Yes, For any balanced and developing nation, an equally empowered population is a must-have.
Yes, For women to make their decisions independently, unafraid and confidently. Just like any member of society should for themselves.
Yes, Improving girls' is critical to creating a safer world for women & girls. empowers girls to need to identify and help with instances of gender-based violence.
Yes, independence, confidence
Yes, It's important for the nation and society to progress.
Yes, It's fair
Yes, The country can only progress when men and women are treated at par with each other and equal opportunity is given to both to perform.
Yes, they will lead the life
Yes, Women empowerment is very important for women to feel confident and to be able to stand up for themselves.
Yes, Women's empowerment will have a cascading effect. Yes, Women need to be able to make decisions that affect their and their children's life, education, and work choices. They need economic freedom ...society today casts their role as housewife and mother whereas they can do much more.
Yes, Women will think in all 360 degrees to approach an issue. Also, if women are empowered equally, society will rise to a bigger level.

According to the respondents, there are various reasons why women's empowerment is crucial. They believe that many sectors still exhibit bias against women and they emphasized that a developing country necessitates an empowered population. They also stated that women should have the freedom to make independent decisions confidently, just like any other member of society. Moreover, as per the respondents, advocating women's empowerment is vital in order to create a safer world, combat gender-based discrimination and motivate women to pursue their potential beyond traditional roles.



**Figure 3: Role of Education Plays in Empowering Women (N=42)**

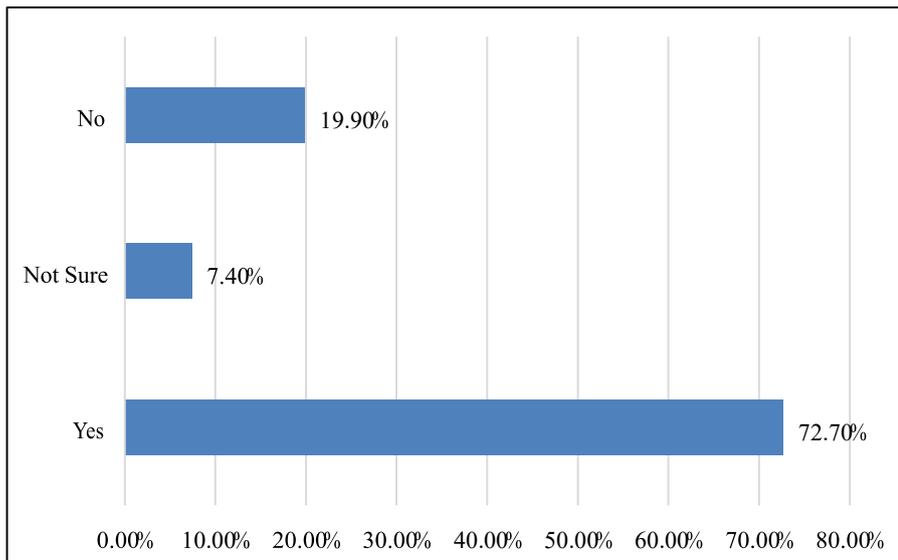
As shown in Figure 3, the vast majority of respondents (92.8 percent) hold the belief that education is vital in empowering women, whereas a small percentage (7.2 percent) hold the opposite view. Education, therefore, is vital to women's empowerment, according to most respondents.



**Figure 4: Being financially independent is the sole prerequisite for empowerment (N=42)**

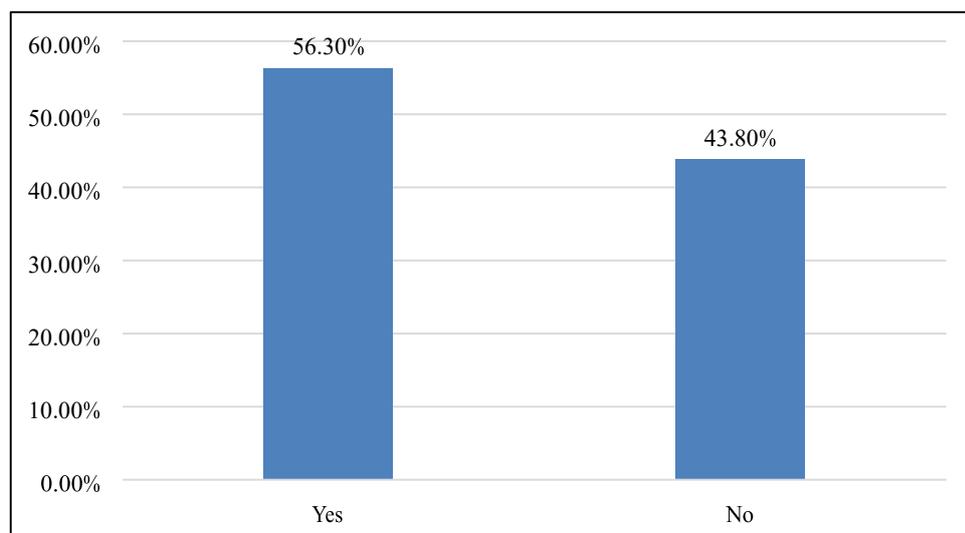
As shown in Figure 4, 9.4% (3) of respondents think that financial independence is the only criterion for empowerment, whereas 90.6% (29) of respondents hold the view that this is not the case.

When asked about the connections between financial independence and empowerment, respondents offered a range of perspectives. Although having one's own means of support is essential, proponents of the idea of empowerment maintain that it involves much more than that. Advocating for women's empowerment in all social obligations, being socially independent, and making choices and decisions on one's own are also part of it. A number of people have brought out the need of education and respect for women as means to amplify their voices in society, while others have argued that empowerment encompasses more than just marriage, motherhood, and personal choices.



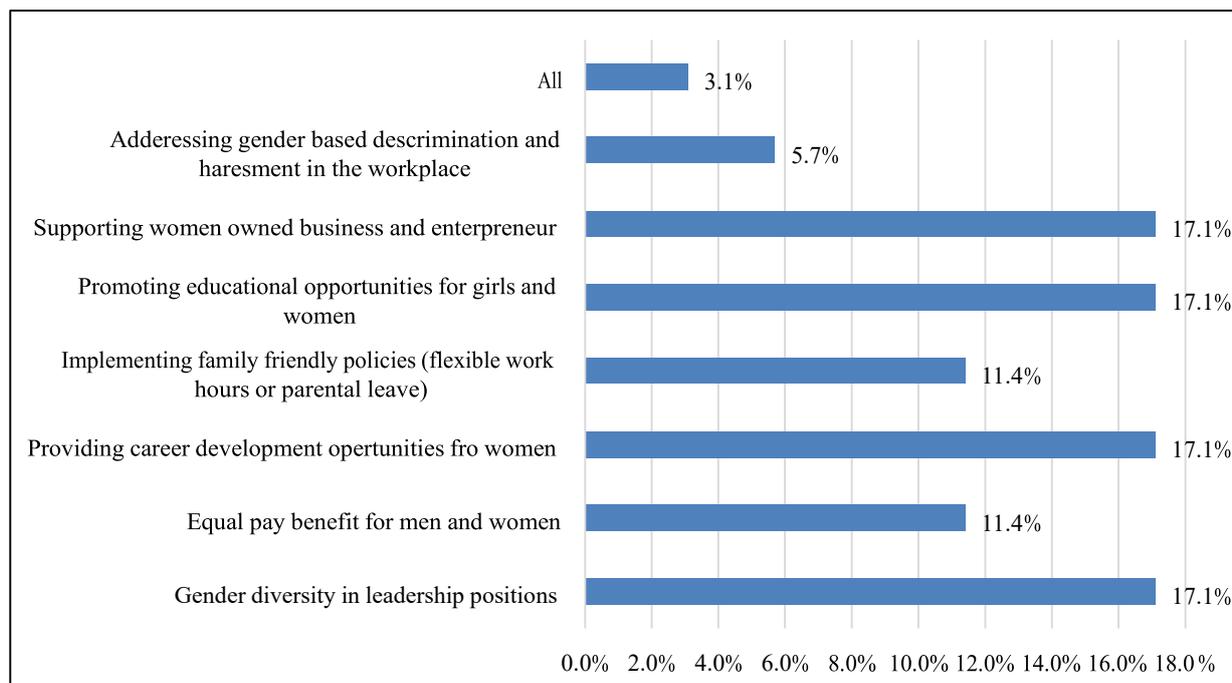
**Figure 5: Workplace Programmes that Encourage and Facilitate Women's Equality (N=42)**

In Figure 5, one can see that 72.7% (33) of the respondents have observed initiatives in their workplace that support women's empowerment. 7.4% (6) of the respondents are not sure if they have observed any such initiatives pertaining to empowering women and 19.9% (3) of the respondents have not observed any such initiatives. Therefore, only 71.9% of the respondents have positively observed such initiatives in their workplace.



**Figure 6: Number of Respondents that have Personally Benefited from Women's Empowerment Initiatives (N=42)**

Figure 6 demonstrates that out of the total number of respondents, 56.3% (24 individuals) have benefited from women's empowerment initiatives, while 43.8% (18 people) have not. Nearly three quarters of respondents (71.9%) believe that CSR initiatives can help empower women. A small percentage (8.1%) are unsure, and a small percentage (3.1%) are of the opinion that CSR initiatives cannot help empower women. Evidently, a sizeable minority (18.8%, or 6 people) think that corporations do a good job of promoting women's empowerment through their CSR programmes. In terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes aimed at empowering women, 31.3% of respondents (or 10 people) think that corporations are somewhat effective, while 21.9% (or 7 people) consider that firms are not effective. In terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts aimed at empowering women, 28.1% of respondents (or 9 people) are unsure.



**Figure 9: Aspects that are Important for Promoting Women's Empowerment through CSR Initiatives. (N=42)**

As shown in Figure 9, a small percentage of respondents (17.1%) think that having women in positions of leadership is crucial to advancing women's empowerment through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. A similar percentage (17.1%) think that giving women opportunities to advance in their careers is important to empowering women, and a similar percentage (17.1%) think that getting more girls and women into good schools is important to empowering women. 11% (04) people think that enacting policies that are friendly to families is important for empowering women, and five percent two people think that encouraging and supporting women-owned businesses and entrepreneurs is important for empowering women. These percentages are identical to the number of people who think that equal pay and benefits for men and women are important for women's empowerment. Addressing gender-based harassment and discrimination in the workplace is important, according to 2.9% (01). Among those who took the survey, 17.1% (06) think that each of the concerns raised is critical to advancing women's equality. According to the participants, limiting traditional family views, unsupportive in-laws, and cultural conventions that restrict chances for women are the primary social barriers to women's empowerment. The respondents stated that women often struggle to openly communicate their emotions. Other difficulties include filling up job gaps, particularly after having a kid, and juggling personal and professional responsibilities. Along with a lack of support from family members at home, the lack of mentorship opportunities in the job is a major obstacle to advancement. The patriarchal mentality and societal biases that persist today, particularly in more rural areas, further exacerbate the problems. To triumph over these challenges and attain genuine empowerment, we need a shift in social attitudes and the establishment of equal rights.

## 5 Discussion

Several important obstacles are highlighted by the main results of this poll on women's empowerment in the workplace. The results can only be understood in the context of prior data and studies on women's empowerment and gender equality.

It has come to light that although many women in corporate America support the idea of women's empowerment for the greater good, not all of them are conversant with the many initiatives aimed at bringing about this empowerment. Being financially independent is essential, but not sufficient, in the view of most women, who believe that empowerment is more comprehensive than that. Being able to make one's own decisions and maintain one's own social independence are two of many more components of empowerment. Concerning corporate-led programmes aimed at empowering women, the fundamental problem that was brought to light was the absence of such other considerations. Both the general public's ignorance and the projects' inherent speculative ness work against them, rendering them ineffective and counterproductive to their intended purpose.

A large percentage of women (28.2%) have not noticed or recognised any initiatives aimed at empowering women at work. And even when women do know about these programmes, that doesn't mean they're all benefiting. Does this imply that their endeavours are just lip service? I don't see why they aren't inclusive enough to help everyone. Do these projects have any additional goals, like boosting the company's bottom line?

"Women and the 'Business' of Human Rights: The Problem with Women's Empowerment Projects and the Need for Corporate Reform" argues that, at first glance, women's empowerment initiatives spearheaded by corporations seem to provide an opportunity for corporations to uphold women's human rights. Upon deeper inspection, however, it becomes clear that empowerment schemes put women at danger of being used as "A form of gender capital" to advance corporate objectives.

One external source of relevant data is the Global Gender Gap Report from the World Economic Forum. Although progress towards gender equality has been gradual, the survey found that it has occurred in a number of areas throughout time. One indicator of women's political empowerment is the fact that, as of the most current reporting year, just 22% of the world's legislators are female. This information follows the survey's conclusion that CSR initiatives should focus on increasing the number of women in executive positions, since this is one of the main areas that respondents feel should be addressed.

Also, companies with more diverse leadership teams, in terms of gender, do better financially than those with less diversity, according to research from McKinsey & Company. The survey found that businesses with a mix of male and female employees had a 21% higher chance of becoming profitable. This provides support for the idea that CSR activities aimed at increasing the representation of women in leadership positions may have positive outcomes for women and businesses alike.

Harvard Business Review research on the efficacy of corporate-led programmes highlights the need of genuine dedication and game-changing actions in promoting gender parity. It appears from the research that symbolic gestures or tokenistic efforts might not result in substantial change. To make a real difference, businesses should instead adopt comprehensive and long-term strategies to empower women. The study found that many respondents are uncertain or sceptical about the success of present programmes, which is in line with this insight. The results of this study have significant consequences. Businesses need to do more than lip service when it comes to empowering women at work. To achieve gender parity in leadership roles, equal pay for equal effort, a healthy work-life balance, and a welcoming and accepting work environment, they need to plan ahead and implement a variety of measures. For such changes to take place, there must be unwavering support from upper management and a readiness to question established practices.

Additionally, businesses should evaluate and solicit feedback from employees often to gauge the success of their projects and focus on the long-term consequences. These efforts can be made more credible and effective by partnering with outside experts and groups who are already working on women's empowerment.

## 6 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the present status of gender equality and the effectiveness of CSR activities by examining women's empowerment programmes in the corporate environment. The study's results also highlight the need for a comprehensive and strategic strategy to promote gender diversity and address women's underrepresentation in leadership positions. The relevance of the study is enhanced by the correlation between the results of the survey and other sources of information. Furthermore, the McKinsey & Company report highlights the financial advantages of gender diversity in leadership teams, providing further evidence for the need to develop successful initiatives.

In addition to the findings emphasised by the Harvard Business Review study, the research provides more evidence that genuine dedication and revolutionary measures are crucial in the fight for gender equality. Notably, in order to promote substantial change, initiatives that are either shallow or tokenistic will not suffice. It is necessary to take a more comprehensive and long-term approach that questions established conventions and practices. The importance of genuine dedication and game-changing actions in promoting gender equality is further emphasised by the study. Companies are urged to take action, not just talk the talk, and put measures in place that can truly make a difference. Equality in leadership roles, equal pay and opportunity, work-life balance, and an inclusive work environment are all crucial parts of women's empowerment programmes that should be tackled one by one. In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the need of promoting gender equality and giving women more agency in the business world. Organisations can take action beyond lip service to foster a more welcoming workplace for all employees. Organisations can benefit from the findings of this study in developing effective CSR activities because they add to the existing body of knowledge on women's empowerment. Building on these findings, future studies might examine more particular sectors and explore other ways to achieve gender equality in the workplace.

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