The Perception of Working Women on Women's Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment, according to World Vision Australia can be defined as "promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others." Organisations around the world have recognized the value women bring to the table and have made several attempts in the form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in order to support and foster women's empowerment in the workplace. While these measures are commendable, it is imperative that we look at them from the perspectives of those who are affected by them the most, i.e. women in the corporate sector. To conduct this study, a survey was designed and circulated to 32 female participants working in the corporate sector, above the age of 20, residing in Delhi, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, using convenient sampling methods. The findings suggest that although many respondents reported the existence of initiatives aimed at empowering women in their workplaces, a significant portion did not personally experience any benefits from these efforts. These findings carry significant implications that underscore the urgency for organisations to transcend superficial gestures and instead adopt comprehensive strategies that challenge long-standing norms and practices. The study emphasises the importance of genuine commitment and transformative measures as instrumental drivers in bringing about substantive change. In conclusion, this research accentuates the imperative for businesses to prioritise gender diversity in leadership roles, ensuring equal opportunities for all employees while advancing work-life balance and fostering an inclusive corporate culture if they desire substantial empowerment initiatives for women. Additionally, this study further expands our understanding of this area by contributing to the existing body of knowledge on women's empowerment. With the help of the findings and insights of this research, organisations can now design impactful corporate social responsibility initiatives that promote gender equality in the corporate setting.

Introduction

All paragraphs, figures, tables text size must be 10 in Times New Roman. 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 analysed 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.

Methodology

Aim of the Study

The research aims to analyse women's empowerment within the corporate setting and evaluate the alignment of corporate initiatives with the goal of achieving women's empowerment. Additionally, the purpose is to investigate the effectiveness of corporate-led initiatives in addressing women's empowerment in the workplace and highlight potential limitations in such efforts.

Research Design

This is exploratory research. It is a form of research aimed to explore a research question and does not offer conclusive resolutions to problems. This research is typically conducted to study a research question that is not definite, but it is conducted in an attempt to understand the nature of the problem in order to better understand it.

Consent and Ethical Issues

The present study adhered to all ethical principles. Participants provided informed consent for data collection, and their confidentiality and privacy were carefully upheld. No information would be shared with any external party, and personal identifiers like names or pictures were not revealed in the article or during the study. The research strictly followed ethical research guidelines.

Consent and Ethical Issues

There were 32 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

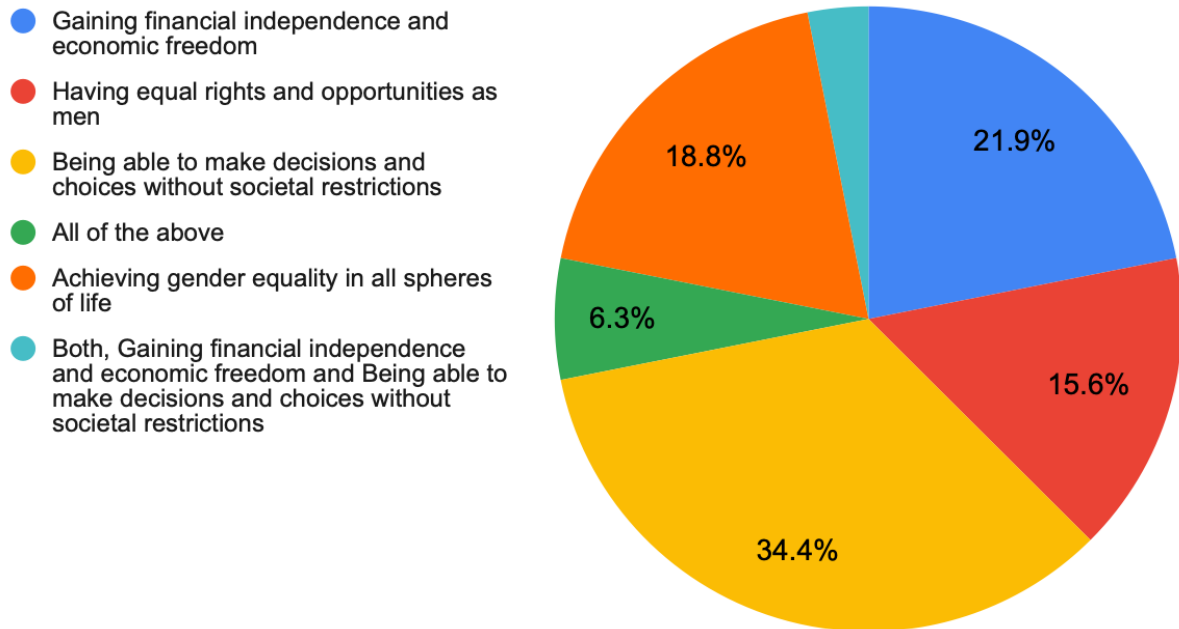|	Description	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	20-30	5	15.6
	31-40	4	12.5
	41-50	12	37.5
	51-60	7	21.9
	60+	4	12.5
Geographic Location	Delhi	11	34.4
	Haryana	13	40.6
	Tamil Nadu	6	18.8
	Maharashtra	2	6.3
The duration of their employment within the organisation.	Less than 1 year	3	12.5
	3-5 years	5	15.6
	5-10 years	8	25
	10+ years	14	43.8
	Based on Different Projects	1	3.1
Mode of Working	Full-time Office	13	40.6
	Hybrid	13	40.6
	Work from home	6	18.8

Tools Used

The survey was conducted via a Google form containing 18 questions. For example:

1. 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 at all effective
   d. I don't know
2. In your opinion, what are some of the key barriers to women's empowerment in society?

Data Collection Procedure

The data collecting technique for this research paper was carried out utilising Google Forms, which provided a simple yet efficient platform for gathering essential information. The participants were offered the chance to complete the form, which consisted of a series of structured questions aimed to collect important data for the study. Before distributing the Google Form, a clear and brief introduction was provided, outlining the goal of the research and securing informed consent from the participants. This introduction portion also featured a brief description of the confidentiality safeguards in place to preserve the respondents' privacy. Participants were led to the Google Form once they decided to participate and gave their consent. The form has several questions that have been carefully designed to collect the necessary data in a methodical and organised manner. The questions addressed several facets of the research issue, such as demographics, attitudes, views, behaviours, and any other relevant characteristics.

Results

Legend:
- Gaining financial independence and economic freedom
- Having equal rights and opportunities as men
- Being able to make decisions and choices without societal restrictions
- All of the above
- Achieving gender equality in all spheres of life
- Both, Gaining financial independence and economic freedom and Being able to make decisions and choices without societal restrictions

Pie chart values: 21.9%, 15.6%, 34.4%, 6.3%, 18.8%

Figure 1. Graphical Representation of What Women's Empowerment Means to the Respondents (N=32)

In Figure 1, one can see that according to 34.4% (11) of the respondents, women's empowerment means being able to make decisions and choices without social restrictions. 21.9% (7) of the respondents believe that women's empowerment means gaining financial independence and economic freedom and 18.8% (6) of the respondents believe that achieving gender equality in all spheres of life is women's empowerment. The number of respondents that believe that women's empowerment means having equal rights and opportunities as men are 15.6% (5), 3.1% (1) of the respondent believes that women's empowerment means both, Gaining financial independence and economic freedom and Being able to make decisions and choices without societal restrictions, and 6.3% (2) think that women's empowerment means all of the mentioned points.

96.9%

● Yes   ● No
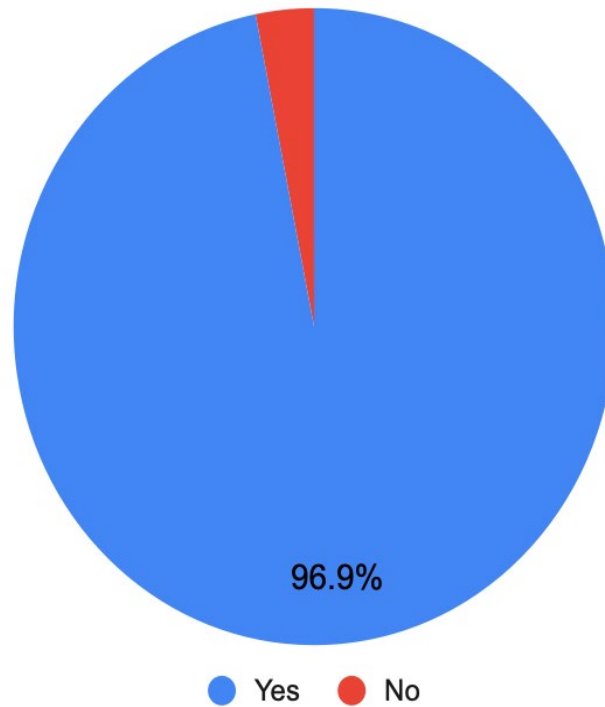
Figure 2. Graphical Representation of the Number of Respondents that Think Women's Empowerment is Needed by Society or Not Needed by Society (N=32)
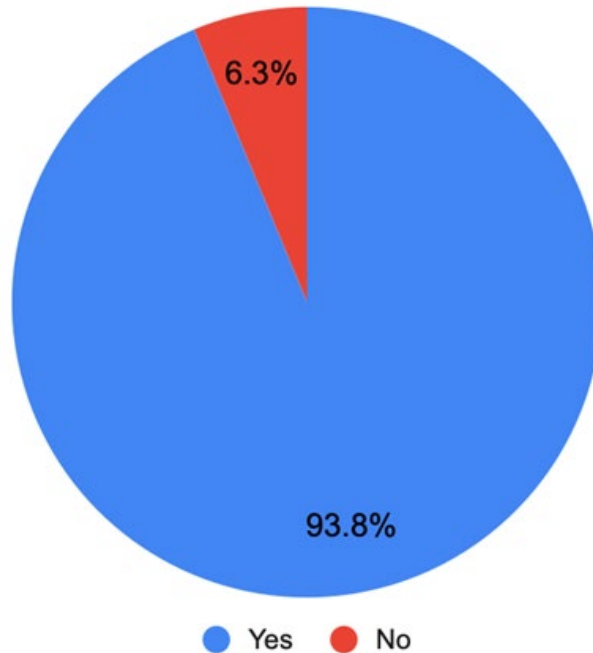
In Figure 2, one can see that 96.9% (31) of the respondents believe that society needs women's empowerment and 3.1% (1) believes that women's empowerment is not required by society.

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 emphasised 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. Graphical Representation of the Number of Respondents who Think that Education Plays a Crucial Role in Empowering Women (N=32)
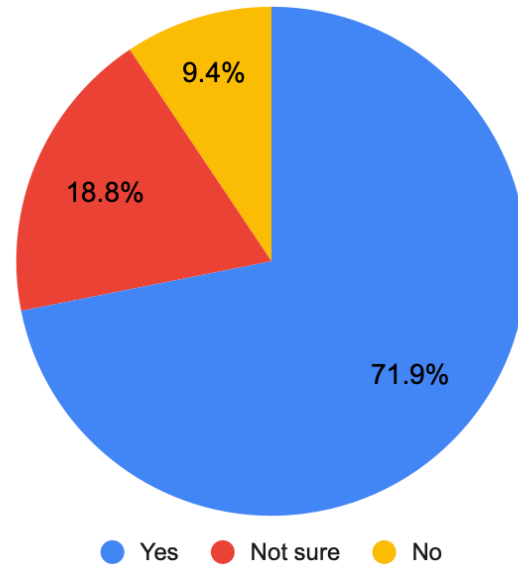
In Figure 3, one can see that 93.8% (30) of the respondents believe that education plays a crucial role in empowering women and 6.3% (2) do not think that education plays a crucial role in empowering women. Hence, a majority of the respondents agree that education is crucial to women's empowerment.
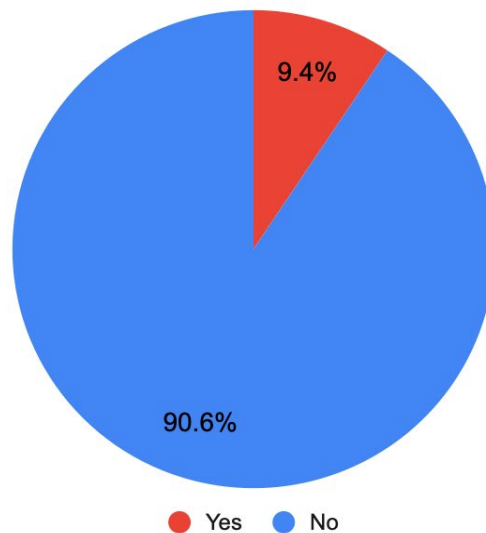
Figure 4. Graphical Representation of the Number of Respondents who Think that Empowerment is Only Related to Being Financially Independent (N=32)

In Figure 4, one can see that 9.4% (3) of the respondents believe that empowerment is only related to being financially independent, however, according to 90.6% (29) of the respondents, empowerment is not just related to being financially independent.

Respondents provided various outlooks on the relationships between financial independence and empowerment. Some argued that while financial independence is crucial for empowerment, empowerment encompasses more than just financial aspects. It also consists of making independent choices and decisions, being socially independent, and advocating for women's empowerment in all social responsibilities. Others stressed that empowerment extends to different spheres of life, including marriage, parenting and even personal choices, while some highlighted the need for education and respect to empower women's voices in society.

Figure 5. Graphical Representation of the Number of Respondents who Have Observed Initiatives that Support Women's Empowerment in their Workplace (N=32)
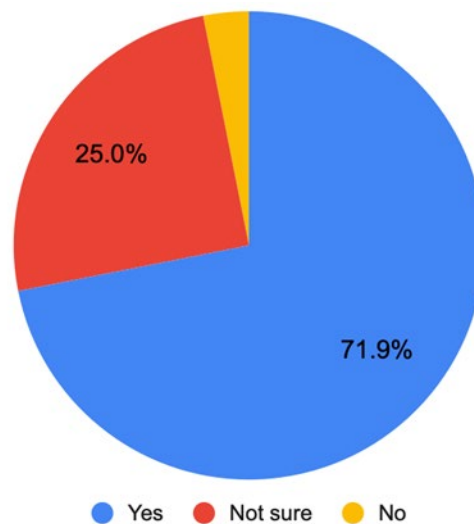
In Figure 5, one can see that 71.9% (23) of the respondents have observed initiatives in their workplace that support women's empowerment. 18.8% (6) of the respondents are not sure if they have observed any such initiatives pertaining to empowering women and 9.4% (3) of the respondents have not observed any such initiatives. Therefore, only 71.9% of the respondents have positively observed such initiatives in their workplace.
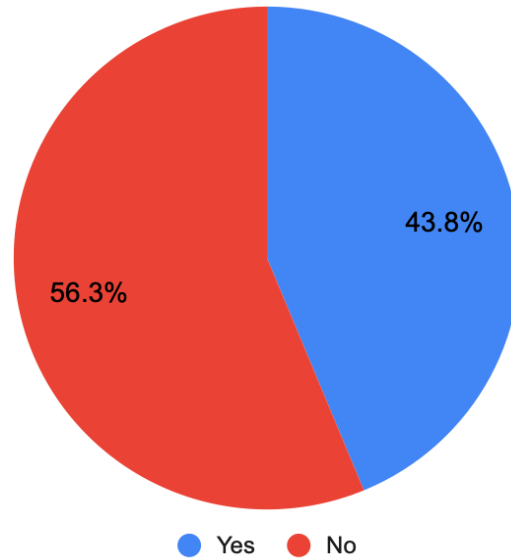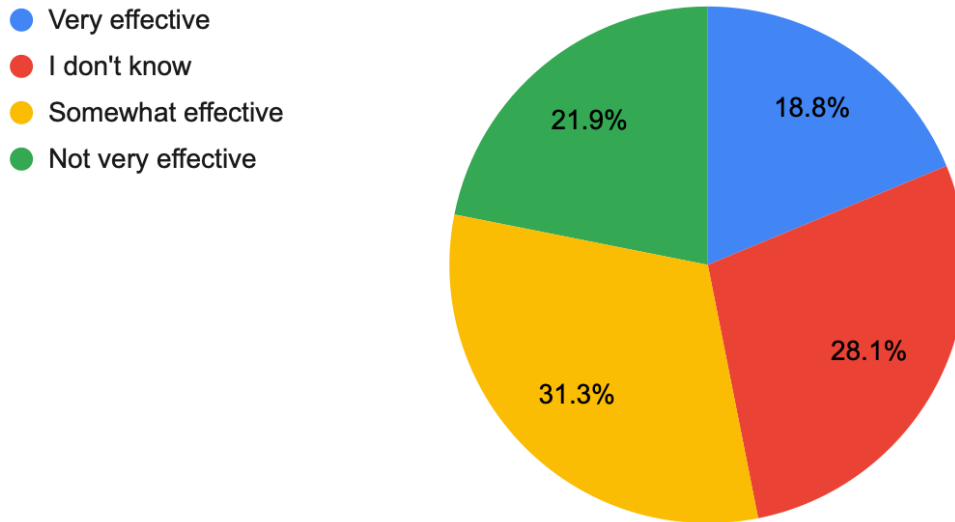
Figure 6. Graphical Representation of the Number of Respondents that have Personally Benefited from Women's Empowerment Initiatives (N=32)

In Figure 6, one can see that 43.8% (14) of the respondents have personally benefited from women's empowerment initiatives, while 56.3% (18) of the respondents have not benefited from any such initiatives.
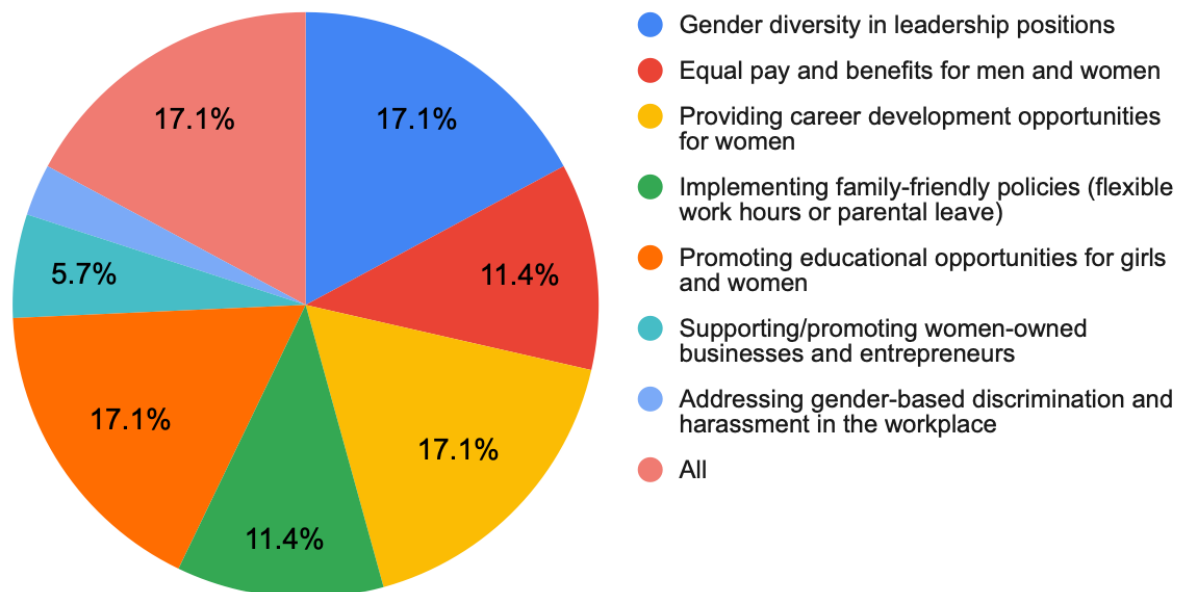

Figure 7. Graphical Representation of the Number of Respondents who Think that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives Can Contribute to Women's Empowerment (N=32)

In Figure 7, one can see that according to 71.9% (23) of the respondents, CSR initiatives can contribute to women's empowerment, while 25% (8) of the respondents are not sure whether CSR initiatives can contribute to empowering women and 3.1% (1) of the respondents think that CSR initiatives cannot contribute to women's empowerment.

Figure 8. Graphical Representation of the Opinions of Respondents Regarding the Effectiveness of Companies in Addressing Women's Empowerment through their CSR Initiatives. (N=32)

In Figure 8, one can see that 18.8% (6) of the respondents believe that companies address women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives very effectively. 31.3% (10) of the respondents think that companies are somewhat effective in addressing women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives and 21.9% (7) of the respondents think that companies do not address women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives effectively. 28.1% (9) of the respondents do not know if companies are effectively addressing women's empowerment through their CSR initiatives.

Figure 9. Graphical Representation of the Opinions of the Respondents Regarding the Aspects that are Important for Promoting Women's Empowerment through CSR Initiatives. (N=35)

In Figure 9, one can see that 17.1% (6) of the respondents believe that gender diversity in leadership positions is important for promoting women's empowerment through CSR initiatives, which is the same as the number of respondents who believe that providing career development opportunities for women is important for empowering women- 17.1% (6) and the number of respondents who believe that promoting educational opportunities for girls and women is important for empowering women- 17.1% (6). The number of respondents who believe that equal pay and benefits for men and women are important for women's empowerment and the number of respondents who believe that implementing family-friendly policies is important for empowering women is the same at 11.4% (4) and 5.7% (2) of the respondents believe that supporting/promoting women-owned businesses and entrepreneurs is important for promoting women's empowerment. 2.9% (1) believe that addressing gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace is important. 17.1% (6) of the respondents believe that all of the mentioned points are important for empowering women.

In Your Opinion, What Are Some of the Key Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Society?

The main hindrances to women's empowerment in society, as per the respondents, include traditional family mindsets that are often considered narrow, unsupportive in-laws, and societal norms that limit opportunities for women. According to the respondents, it is not uncommon for women to find it challenging to express their feelings freely. Other challenges include balancing personal and professional lives and addressing existing gaps in their careers, especially after childbirth. Specifically at the workplace, it is the limited mentorship opportunities that hinder progress along with the lack of support from family members at home. Furthermore, the patriarchal mindset and the societal prejudices that remain prevalent to date, especially in smaller towns and villages add to the impediments. What is required to overcome these obstacles and achieve true empowerment is equal rights and a change in societal perceptions.

Discussion

The primary findings of this survey on women's empowerment in the workplace point to a number of challenges that must be addressed. To fully comprehend the significance of the findings, they must be considered following previous statistics and research on gender equality and women's empowerment.

It has been revealed that while a significant share of women in the corporate world believe in the concept of women's empowerment for the betterment of society, not all of them are aware of the various efforts being made to achieve this form of empowerment. According to the majority of the women, empowerment can not be solely linked to being financially independent and while it is very crucial it is not enough. There are multiple other aspects to empowerment such as being socially independent and having the ability to make independent choices. The underlying issue that was highlighted was the lack of representation of such other factors when it came to empowering women through corporate-led initiatives. The lack of awareness of such initiatives along with their overall speculative nature goes against the efficiency and aim of such initiatives.

A considerable proportion of women (28.2%) have failed to perceive or acknowledge any efforts towards women's empowerment within their workplaces. Furthermore, even when women are aware of such initiatives, not all of them experience their benefits. Does this suggest that these initiatives are merely superficial in nature? Why aren't they inclusive enough to benefit everyone involved? Are there other motives behind these initiatives, perhaps any advantages for the organisation itself? According to "Women and the 'Business' of Human Rights: The Problem with Women's Empowerment Projects and the Need for Corporate Reform", on the surface, corporate-led women's empowerment projects appear to offer corporate action to respect the human

rights of women. A closer examination, however, indicates that women who participate in empowerment projects are instead at risk of being utilised as 'A form of gender capital' in order to further corporate goals.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report is one source of pertinent external data. Gender equality has improved in numerous sectors throughout the years, according to the study, but development has been slow. In terms of political empowerment, for example, the study states that just 22% of the world's parliamentarians are women as of the recent reporting year. This data is following the survey's finding that women continue to be underrepresented in corporate leadership roles, which is one of the primary areas that respondents say should be addressed through CSR programmes.

In addition, a McKinsey & Company study discovered that organisations with more gender-diverse leadership teams outperform their less diverse counterparts financially. According to the report, gender-diverse enterprises are 21% more likely to be profitable. This lends credence to the claim that boosting gender diversity in leadership roles through CSR programmes may result in substantial advantages for both women and enterprises.

In terms of the effectiveness of corporate-led initiatives, research conducted by the Harvard Business Review emphasises the significance of authentic commitment and transformative measures in enabling gender equality. The study suggests that tokenistic attempts or symbolic gestures may not lead to significant change. Instead, companies need to embrace holistic and sustained approaches to women's empowerment to create a lasting impact. This insight aligns with the survey's finding that many respondents are uncertain or sceptical about the success of current initiatives.

These findings have profound implications. Enterprises must go beyond superficial initiatives and token gestures to effectively empower women in the workplace. They must take a strategic and comprehensive approach to address gender diversity in leadership, promote equal opportunities and remuneration, provide support for work-life balance and create an inclusive and supportive workplace culture. Implementing such measures necessitates genuine leadership commitment as well as a willingness to challenge old norms and procedures.

Furthermore, enterprises should prioritise the long-term impact and track the effectiveness of their initiatives through frequent evaluations and employee feedback. Collaborating with external professionals and organisations working on women's empowerment can also enhance the reliability and effectiveness of these efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study on women's empowerment initiatives in the corporate setting delivers noteworthy insights into the current state of gender equality and the success of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Moreover, the importance of taking a comprehensive and strategic approach to addressing women's underrepresentation in leadership roles and promoting gender diversity is emphasised through the findings of this study.

The correlation between the survey findings and external data further strengthens the significance of the research. In addition, the study conducted by McKinsey & Company stresses the financial benefits of gender diversity in leadership teams, underlining the argument for implementing effective programmes.

The research also sheds light on the importance of authentic commitment and transformative actions in promoting gender equality, as highlighted by the Harvard Business Review study. It is to be noted that superficial or tokenistic efforts are insufficient to drive significant change. Instead, a holistic and sustained approach that challenges traditional norms and practices is required. The study also highlights why authentic commitment and transformative measures are imperative in fostering gender equality.

There is an emphasis on the need for enterprises to move beyond symbolic gestures and actually implement comprehensive measures capable of bringing about change. Addressing gender diversity in leadership,

promoting equal opportunities and pay, supporting work-life balance, and fostering an inclusive workplace culture are essential components of effective women's empowerment initiatives that must be focused on equally and individually.

In summary, this research underscores the necessity of addressing gender inequality and empowering women in the corporate setting. Enterprises can create a more inclusive work environment by going beyond surface-level initiatives and adopting comprehensive strategies. The insights provided by the findings of this research contribute to the current body of information on women's empowerment that can help organisations design effective CSR initiatives. Future research might expand on these findings to delve deeper into specific areas and investigate additional avenues for achieving gender equality in the corporate setting.

Acknowledgments

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