

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND VIKSIT BHARAT THROUGH EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACEDr. Vennila Gopal¹, Dr. N. Chandru², Dr. Marina Joshy C³, Dr. D. Sivasakthi, Dr. C. Kandasamy⁴, Mrs. R. Janani⁵¹Associate Professor of Economics, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India. Email: vennilag11@gmail.com, ORCID id: 0009-0000-9728-1678.²Associate Professor of Commerce, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India. Email: chandrumuthu30@gmail.com, ORCID id: 0000-0001-5292-1766³Assistant Professor of Commerce with Professional Accounting and Corporate Secretaryship, Sri Krishna Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India. Email: marinajash@gmail.com, ORCID id : 0009-0000-9299-1777.⁴Associate Professor of Commerce with Professional Accounting, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India. Email: rithikasri20@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2952-6482.⁵Associate Professor of Commerce, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India. Email: Kandssakthi92@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0009-4224-5165.⁶Assistant Professor of Commerce with Business Process Services, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, TamilNadu, India. Email: jananir2017@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7151-5257**ABSTRACT**

The vision of Sustainable Development Goals 2030 emphasizes inclusive development by engaging the full potential of the working-age population irrespective of gender or socio-economic background. In this perspective, equal representation of women in the workplace is a critical step towards national development. Women's participation in economic activities enhances productivity, fosters innovation, and accelerates equitable growth essential for a country to emerge as a developed nation. Recent past data of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) indicate substantial progress in India's women's labour force participation, with the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) increasing from 23.3 per cent in 2017–18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023–24, alongside a significant rise in the Worker Population Ratio (WPR). Despite these improvements, challenges such as higher female unemployment, wage gaps, occupational segregation, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and work–life balance constraints persist in the country.

Based on 120 women employed in different sectors, the present study examines workplace equality among women workers by analysing organizational policies, recruitment and promotion practices, pay equity, mentoring, and support systems. It further explores women's perceptions of professional growth, leadership opportunities, and empowerment. The findings aim to provide insights for policymakers and academicians on strengthening gender-equal workplaces as a pathway toward achieving the SDG 2030.

KEY WORDS: Gender equality, Equal Representation, Empowerment, Viksit Bharat, Sustainable Development**INTRODUCTION**

The vision of SDG 2030 is rooted in inclusive development that engaging the full potential of all working age population irrespective of gender, caste, or socio-economic background. In this perspective, equal representation of women in the workforce is a step towards attaining SDG 2030. Women participation in economic activities enhances productivity, strengthens institutional resilience, fosters innovation, and accelerates equitable growth which are essential for India's attainment of SDG 2030 and its emergence as a fully developed nation by 2047 – a vision of Viksit Bharat 2027, marking 100 years of Independence.

In recent years, India has made notable progress in women's labour force participation, reflecting changes in labour markets, policy frameworks, and socio-cultural attitudes. According to data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and Government of India sources, women's employment indicators have witnessed significant improvements over the decades. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) — representing the percentage of women aged 15 years and above who are either employed or actively seeking work — climbed from approximately 23.3 per cent in 2017–18 to around 41.7 per cent in 2023–24, showing almost double increase in participation over this period [<https://www.pib.gov.in>]. The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) — which reflects the proportion of women actually engaged in work rose from about 22 per cent to over 40 per cent within the same timeframe – a move towards attaining SDG 5 and attaining one of the key pillars for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047 of ensuring 70 per cent women workforce participation in the country [Women's employment rate nearly doubled to 40.3 per cent in the last seven years, *The Economic Times*, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>]

Despite these positive trends, significant challenges persist that constrain women representation, especially in leadership roles and higher-skilled occupations. Unemployment rates for women continue to be higher than for men, showing barriers to equitable access to work and career progression. Women also face persistent wage gaps, occupational segregation, limited access to formal pathways for leadership, and difficulties in balancing work–life. There is uneven distribution of women and men across occupations and hierarchical levels, with women overrepresented in lower-paid, "feminized" sectors (care, education, clerical) and underrepresented in high-earning leadership roles.

The present research focuses on focusing on workplace equality of women workers. It aims to find workplace policies (such as recruitment, promotion, work flexibility, pay equity, mentoring, women-specific support systems), organizational cultures, barriers and facilitators to women's advancement. The study finds how women perceive their opportunities for professional growth, leadership roles, recognition, work–life balance, and empowerment within their workplaces.

The findings of this study will contribute to policy makers and academicians in understanding of how workplaces can pave way for attainment of the SDG 2030 and the goals of Viksit Bharat 2047.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality (IWWAGE) (2023)'s report focused on integrating care work and unpaid labor into economic policy discussions. It highlighted that women's participation limited by unpaid domestic responsibilities and claimed for policy recognition of care economy contributions as essential for inclusive growth.

Feminist Policy India (2024)'s *The India Gender Report 2024* emphasized a shift from welfare to empowerment approaches in policy. It highlighted the need for gender-transformative digital and platform economies, ensuring women inclusion in emerging sectors. The report also stressed structural reforms for sustained workplace participation.

World Economic Forum (2024)'s *The Global Gender Gap Report 2024* showed that only 68.5% of the global gender gap is closed, and at the current pace, parity may take over a century. Economic participation remains one of the largest gaps, reinforcing the importance of women's workplace representation.

Women Leadership Center (2024)'s recent evidence-based reports indicated that increasing women's participation improves enterprise productivity, innovation, and governance outcomes, reinforcing the SDG-development link.

Myra Khurana (2025), in the study "Women at Work: The Economics of Gender Inequality," stated that rising female labor force participation in India (around 41.7% in 2023–24) does not necessarily indicate empowerment. The study found that many women enter the workforce due to economic distress rather than opportunity, and remain concentrated in low-quality, informal jobs. The paper stated that quality of employment, financial inclusion, and asset ownership were more important indicators than participation alone.

McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org (2025)'s, *The Women in the Workplace 2025* report highlighted gradual improvement in women's representation across corporate hierarchies, especially in leadership roles. However, progress is uneven—top-performing companies showed gains, while others stagnate. The report emphasized that organizational commitment, mentorship, and inclusive policies were key drivers of sustained gender diversity.

Udaiti Foundation (2025)'s recent research showed that more than 50% of NSE-listed companies employed less than 10% women, indicating a major gap between policy intent and actual representation. The study called for stronger corporate accountability and diversity mandates (*The Economic Times*)

World Bank Data-based Studies (2023–2025)'s recent analyses showed that only about one-quarter of Indian women participate in the labor force, significantly below global averages. Women were largely concentrated in informal or unpaid work, highlighting persistent structural inequalities.

Udaiti (2025), the employer-focused study found that workplace inclusion depends heavily on organizational culture, flexible work policies, and leadership accountability. It emphasized that ESG and sustainability frameworks were pushing companies toward gender diversity.

Centre for Public Policy Research (2025)'s study highlighted that women's workforce participation in India remained low, particularly in urban areas. It links improvements in rural participation to self-help groups (SHGs) and government schemes, but notes that quality employment remains a challenge.

METHODOLOGY

Random sampling technique was employed in selecting 120 women workers employed in different sectors in Coimbatore city. The responses were elicited through a detailed interview schedule personally administered. The required data were collected through personal interview method. Using the limited category response method, the respondents were asked to mark their perception on a five-point scale and suitable statistical tools were employed for analysis.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

I. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Understanding socio-economic background of women is crucial to know about their access to education, employment, and workplace opportunities. It brings out how the differences in income, location, marital status, etc. affect women representation. These factors have an impact on women's financial independence, decision-making power, and career growth. Hence analyzing them would help identify barriers to equal representation and frame inclusive policies aligned with SDG 2030 and Viksit Bharat 2047.

The findings of the present study indicate that majority of the respondents (54.16%) belonged to the age group of 30 to 40, about 34.16% in 20 to 30 age group and only 11.6% in 40 to 50 age group. In terms of employment, around 57.5% of the respondents were employed in private sector, 25% in public sector, and 17.5% were women entrepreneurs, indicating most among the respondents worked in private sector.

The women respondents worked as school teachers, head mistresses, accountants, accounts managers, assistant managers, bank managers, entrepreneurs in beauty care services, restaurants, grocery shops, departmental stores, fast food, boutique, chief executive manager, college professors, clerks, data analysts, doctors, housekeeping, human resource managers, IT employees, junior executive officer, lab assistant, lab technician, marketing professionals, media personnel, personal assistants, railway officers, sales managers, software developer, tailors and village administrative officers.

The educational profile revealed that a significant proportion (81.66%) possessed higher education, while a low proportion (18.32%) with primary, secondary, higher secondary and diploma education.

**TABLE 1
SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Sl. No.	Variables	Percentage	Sl. No.	Variables	Percentage
1	Age (In Years)		2	Sector	
	20-30	34.16		Public sector employee	25
	30-40	54.16		Private sector employee	57.5
	40-50	11.6	Women Entrepreneur	17.5	
3	Education		4	Marital Status	
	Primary Education	0.83		Married	58.3
	Secondary Education	2.5		Unmarried	29.2
	Higher Secondary	11.66	Destitute women	12.5	
	Higher Education	81.66	Community		
	Diploma	3.33	FC	3.3	
5	Religion		6	BC	49.2
	Hindu	89.2		MBC	19.2
	Muslim	5.8		SC	9.2
Christian	5	ST		12.5	
		OC		6.7	
7	Area		8	Family Monthly Income (In Rs.)	
	Rural	58.3		Below 50000	28.33
	Urban	41.7		50000 - 100000	46.66
9	Monthly Savings (In Rs.)			100000 - 150000	10.83
	Below 20000	59.16		150000 - 200000	8.33
	20000 - 40000	25		200000 - 250000	2.5
	40000 - 60000	14.16	Above 250000	3.33	
	Above 60000	1.66			
10	Monthly Debt (In Rs.)				
	Below 20000	62.5	60000 - 80000	4.16	
	20000 - 40000	15.83	Above 80000	1.66	
	40000 - 60000	15.83			

Source: Primary data, 2026

With regard to marital status, about 58.3% of the respondents were married, 29.2% were unmarried, and 12.5% were destitute women. Findings on religious composition showed that around 89.2% of respondents followed Hinduism, with a lesser proportion following Islam (5.8%) and Christianity (5%). In case of community, nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) belonged to Backward Classes (BC), and the remaining 50.9% comprising respondents from MBC, SC, ST, FC, and OC categories.

Area-wise distribution revealed that almost 58.3% of respondents were from rural areas and 41.7% from urban areas. In terms of income distribution, around 46.66% of women respondent's family received a monthly income between ₹.50,000 and ₹.1,00,000 per month, around 28.33% received below ₹50,000.

Savings patterns showed that almost 59.16% of respondent families saved less than ₹.20,000 a month, and only a very small proportion saved above ₹.60,000 revealing a low savings among the families.

Debt profile indicated that about 62.5% of respondent families had a monthly debt below ₹.20,000, while a smaller proportion had higher debts.

TABLE 2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	120	20	50	32.02	6.022
Monthly Income	120	10000	250000	81416.67	53444.047
Monthly Saving	120	0	70000	19935.00	15934.750
Monthly Debt	120	0	100000	18453.15	21968.782

Source: Primary data, 2026

Descriptive statistics revealed the average age to be 32.02 years with a moderate variation (SD = 6.022) in age among the respondents. The average family monthly income was ₹81,416.67 with a high standard deviation (₹53,444.047), showing significant income disparities among the respondent families. Monthly savings average was found to be ₹19,935 and the average monthly debt was ₹18,453.15.

II. SUPPORTIVE ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES

**TABLE 3
SUPPORTIVE ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES**

Supportive Organisational Policies	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Recruitment process is free of gender bias	13.33	30.83	26.66	25	4.16
Promotion process is free from gender bias	3.33	38.33	43.33	14.16	0.83
Flexible working options are provided	7.5	25	31.66	30.83	5
Leadership mentoring programs are conducted	5	25	34.16	25.83	10
Paid remuneration equal to men	6.66	26.66	32.5	25	9.16
Provided equal networking opportunities	7.5	21.66	30.83	29.16	10.83
Women development programmes are conducted	4.16	25.83	31.66	28.33	10
Provided with maternity leave	9.16	40.83	26.66	21.66	1.66
Provided paid maternity leave	14.16	28.33	36.66	17.5	3.33
Have job security	5.83	22.5	42.5	18.33	10.

Source: Primary data, 2026

Findings on supportive organizational policies revealed that a significant proportion (30.83%) of the women respondents agreed that the recruitment process in their workplace was free of gender bias. Most of them were neutral (43.33%) on accepting that the promotion process in their organizations were free from gender bias.

Most disagreed (30.83%) on flexible working options. Most were neutral (34.16%) to conduct of leadership mentoring programs. About 32.5% were neutral to pay equality. Most respondents disagreed (40%) to equal networking opportunities at workplace.

There was neutral opinion (31.66%) on conduct of women development programs. A majority (49.99%) agreed that they were provided maternity leave and were neutral (36.66%) to paid maternity leave. And they were also neutral (42.5%) towards job security.

III. SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION

TABLE 4 SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION

Supportive Workplace Culture and Equal Representation	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
There is gender balance in entry-level positions	7.5	28.33	40.83	20	3.33
There is gender balance in executive roles	8.33	27.5	30.83	28.33	5
Workplace culture values diversity	6.66	28.33	27.5	21.66	15.83
Supports my career development	12.5	23.33	35.83	20.83	7.5
I am represented for high-level positions	7.5	30.83	30	27.5	4.16
Opportunity is given to fulfil one's potential	7.5	35	28.33	24.16	5
Have equal access to resources	8.33	23.33	35.83	23.33	9.16
My organization trusts my work	5	21.66	34.16	32.5	6.66
There is no workplace sexual harassment	7.5	30	37.5	20	5
There is stress free work environment	11.66	29.16	29.16	21.66	8.33

Source: Primary data, 2026

Findings revealed that a majority were neutral towards gender balance at entry-level positions (40.83%) and gender balance in executive roles (35.83%) showing limited representation of women at higher levels.

While 34.99% agreed that workplace culture valued diversity, another 37.49% disagreed to it. Most respondents were neutral (35.83%) to the statement that their workplace supports their career development.

A higher percentage (38.33%) agreed to the statement that there was representation of women in high-level positions in their workplaces. A higher proportion (42.5%) agreed that there were opportunities to fulfill one's potential.

There were neutral responses (35.83%) in terms of equal access to resources. There was disagreement in (32.5%) to the organizational trust toward the work of employees.

Most of the respondents were neutral (37.5%) towards absence of sexual harassment at workplace. But there was agreement (40.82%) in terms of stress-free work environment.

IV. WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

TABLE 5 WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women Representation and Women Leadership	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Able to pursue my leadership without sacrificing home life	10.83	34.16	29.16	18.33	7.5
Able to balance my work-life	0.83	37.5	37.5	23.3	0.83
Have developed my skill	4.16	28.33	42.5	23.33	1.66
Could achieve my aspirations	2.5	30	35	28.3	4.16
My leadership talent has improved	5.83	23.33	32.5	26.66	11.66
My confidence level has increased	4.16	24.16	36.66	31.66	3.33
Has brought positive change in my attitude and behavior	5	28.33	44.16	20	2.5
Has helped me identify and overcome personal and professional challenges	4.16	41.66	31.66	18.33	4.16
Feel empowered	10.83	24.16	40.83	18.33	5.83

Source: Primary data, 2026

Most of the women respondents agreed (34.16%) that they were able to pursue leadership without sacrificing home life, while a considerable percentage were neutral (29.16%) to it. Many were neutral (37.5%) with regard to their ability to balance work-life, while a similar percentage agreed (37.5%) to it.

A significant percentage of the respondents were neutral (42.5%) to the statement that they have developed their skills at workplace, and were also neutral (35%) with regard to achieving their aspirations.

Most were neutral (32.5%) on improvement in their leadership talent and also neutral (36.66%) to an increase in their confidence level. A significant percentage were also neutral (44.16%) to experiencing positive changes in their attitude and behavior.

Majority agreed (41.66%) that leadership experiences helped them identify and overcome personal and professional challenges and a vast were neutral (40.83%) on feeling empowered.

V. WORKPLACE MOTIVATION FOR EQUAL REPRESENTATION AND RURAL-URBAN BACKGROUND: CHI-SQUARE TEST

The association between background (rural/urban) of the women respondents and their workplace motivation for equal representation was found by applying Chi-square test.

The null hypothesis tested was

H₀: There is no significant association between background of the respondents (rural/urban) and workplace motivation for equal representation.

H_a: There is association between background of the respondents (rural/urban) and workplace motivation for equal representation.

TABLE 6 WORKPLACE MOTIVATION FOR EQUAL REPRESENTATION AND RURAL-URBAN BACKGROUND: CHI-SQUARE TEST

Variables	Chi square value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Inference
Recruitment process is free of gender bias	7.141 ^a	4	0.129	Accepted
Promotion process is free from gender bias	2.319 ^a	4	0.677	Accepted
There is gender balance in entry-level positions	2.436 ^a	4	0.656	Accepted
There is gender balance in executive roles	0.393 ^a	4	0.983	Accepted
Workplace culture values diversity	4.320 ^a	4	0.364	Accepted

Flexible working options are provided	1.657 ^a	4	0.799	Accepted
Leadership mentoring program are conducted	11.857 ^a	4	0.18	Accepted
Paid remuneration equal to men	2.230 ^a	4	0.694	Accepted
Supports my career development	11.223 ^a	4	0.24	Accepted
I am represented for high-level positions	1.391 ^a	4	0.846	Accepted
Opportunity is given to fulfill one's potential	4.777 ^a	4	0.311	Accepted
Have equal access to resources	1.847 ^a	4	0.764	Accepted
Provided equal networking opportunities	1.932 ^a	4	0.748	Accepted
Women development programs are conducted	0.725 ^a	4	0.948	Accepted
My organization trusts my work	6.843 ^a	4	0.144	Accepted
There is stress free work environment	14.982 ^a	4	0.005*	Rejected
Provided with maternity leave	3.800 ^a	4	0.434	Accepted
Provided paid maternity leave	13.182 ^a	4	0.010*	Rejected
Have job security	3.934 ^a	4	0.415	Accepted

Source: calculations based on field survey, 2026

Note: *Significant at 5%.

Chi-square test result revealed that there was no significant association between the 'rural-urban' background of the women respondents and workplace motivational factors such as 'Recruitment process is free of gender bias', 'Promotion process is free from gender bias', 'There is gender balance in entry-level positions', 'There is gender balance in executive roles', 'Workplace culture values diversity', 'Flexible working options are provided', 'Leadership mentoring programs are conducted', 'Paid remuneration equal to men', 'Supports my career development', 'I am represented for high-level positions', 'Opportunity is given to fulfill one's potential', 'Have equal access to resources', 'Provided equal networking opportunities', 'Women development programs are conducted', 'My organization trusts my work', 'Provided with maternity leave' and 'Have job security'.

It was also found that there was association between the 'rural-urban' background of the women respondents and workplace motivational factors such as 'There is stress free work environment' and 'Have job security'.

VI. DIFFERENCE IN THE EMPOWERMENT LEVEL OF WOMEN – 'F' TEST

A quantitative analysis was carried out to find whether there was any significant difference between the empowerment of women between groups and within groups. For the analysis, 'F' test was applied.

The null hypothesis tested was

H₀: There was no significant difference in the empowerment of women between groups and within groups.

H_a: There is difference in the empowerment of women between groups and within groups.

TABLE 7 DIFFERENCE IN THE EMPOWERMENT LEVEL OF WOMEN – 'F' TEST

Feel Empowered	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	'F' Value	Significance
Between Groups	.141	2	.070	.064	.938
Within Groups	127.851	117	1.093		
Total	127.992	119			

Source: Calculations based on field survey, 2026

Findings reveal that the calculated F value is 0.064, and the corresponding significance (p-value) is 0.938. Since the p-value is much greater than the standard level of 0.05, the result is not statistically significant. Hence, there is no significant difference in the empowerment level of women across the groups. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The women respondents in the study area were educated, married, and employed in private sector. A look into organizational practices and gender equality reveals that a large proportion of respondents were neutral on aspects such as promotion fairness, gender balance, access to resources, mentoring programs, and workplace safety. This reveals lack of strong positive perception on equal representation. Some positive signs of representation are respondents' agreement on maternity leave provisions, opportunity to fulfill potential, and overcoming challenges. Empowerment areas on skill development, confidence, leadership improvement, and overall empowerment also showed neutral responses. On the whole, the level of women empowerment and equal representation was moderate.

Flexible work practices, such as remote work possibilities, and flexible hours can be provided to meet the varied demands of women. This improves women's retention and engagement by assisting them in successfully balancing their personal and professional obligations. Employees and leaders should receive training on identifying and reducing biases that could influence decision-making processes.

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