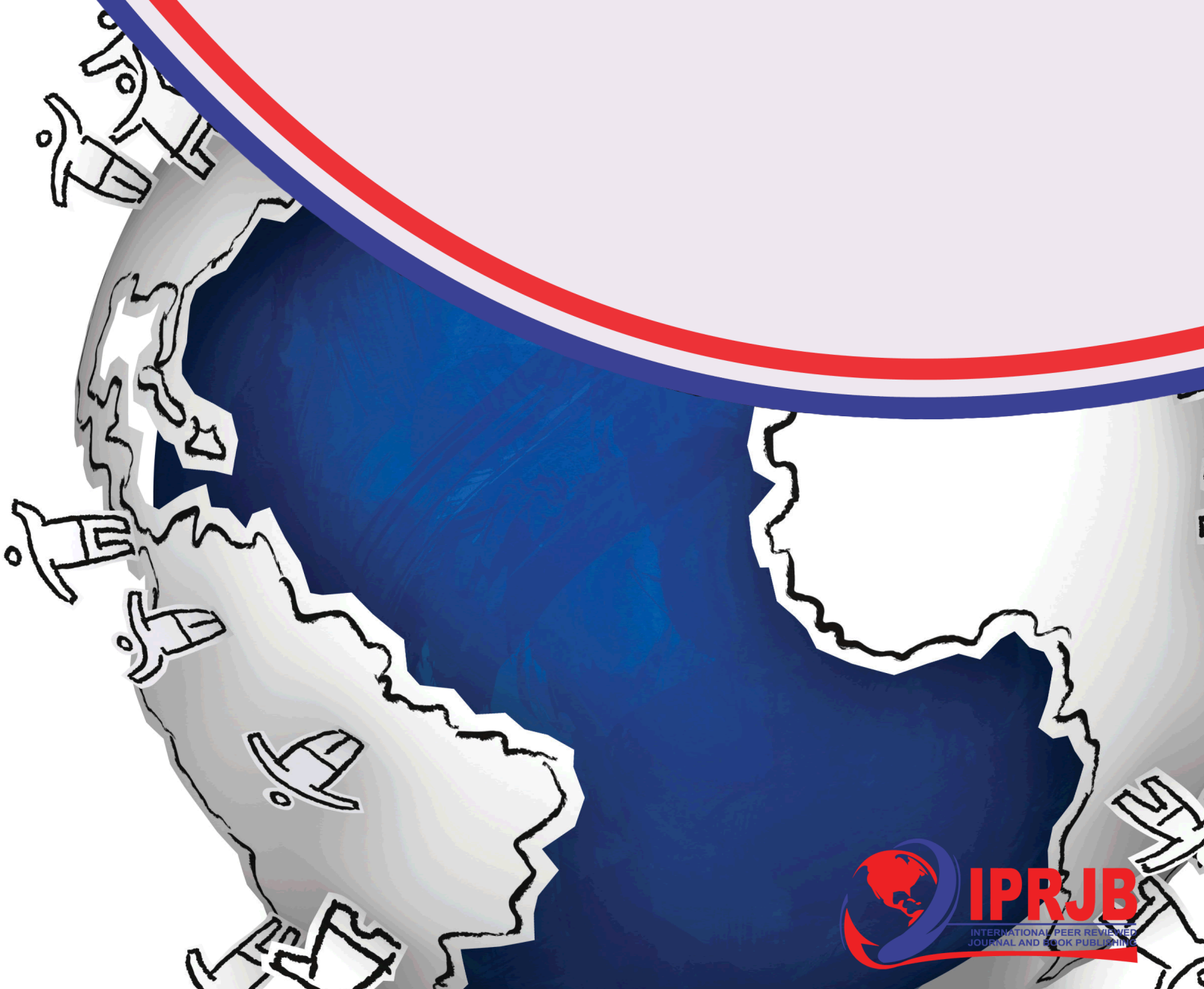



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Gender Inequality in the Workplace in Japan

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the gender inequality in the workplace in Japan.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Gender inequality in Japan's workplace persists despite initiatives to promote equality, with women facing challenges in accessing leadership roles and equal pay. Traditional gender norms and demanding work cultures contribute to limited career advancement opportunities for women, resulting in a significant gender gap in senior positions. Despite efforts to address these issues through policies promoting women's workforce participation and equal employment opportunities, progress remains slow.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Gender stratification theory, intersectionality theory & social role theory may be used to anchor future studies on analyze the gender inequality in the workplace in Japan. Implement targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and diversity quotas, to increase the representation of women in senior management positions, fostering a more inclusive organizational culture and challenging traditional gender roles. Advocate for policy reforms that mandate gender diversity quotas on corporate boards and executive leadership teams, drawing on successful practices from other countries to promote greater transparency and accountability in corporate governance.

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Workplace*

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational status, encompassing job position, salary, and promotion rates, serves as a key indicator of individuals' socioeconomic standing within a given society. In developed economies like the United States, disparities in occupational status persist despite advancements in gender equality initiatives. For example, a study by Jones (2017) found that women in the United States continue to face barriers to career advancement, with fewer women occupying leadership positions compared to men. Additionally, gender wage gaps persist, with women earning approximately 82 cents for every dollar earned by men, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2020). These trends highlight ongoing challenges in achieving gender parity in occupational status within developed economies, necessitating continued efforts to address systemic barriers and promote equitable opportunities for all.

Similarly, in developed economies such as Japan, gender disparities in occupational status remain pronounced despite efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace. For instance, research by Tanaka and Yamamoto (2018) revealed significant gender gaps in promotion rates within Japanese corporations, with women facing greater obstacles to career advancement compared to men. Moreover, data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) in Japan show that women's average annual salary is approximately 30% lower than men's, reflecting entrenched gender biases and structural inequalities in the labor market (MHLW, 2020). These findings underscore the need for comprehensive policy interventions and organizational reforms to address gender-based disparities in occupational status and promote greater diversity and inclusion within developed economies.

In developing economies, such as those in Southeast Asia, occupational status is also marked by significant gender disparities. For example, in countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, women are often concentrated in low-paying and informal sector jobs, while men dominate higher-paying formal sector positions (ADB, 2019). Additionally, data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) show that women in developing economies are less likely to receive promotions or access leadership positions compared to men, perpetuating cycles of gender inequality and economic marginalization (ILO, 2020). These trends underscore the need for targeted interventions to address structural barriers and promote equal opportunities for women in the labor market within developing economies.

Similarly, in South Asia, gender disparities in occupational status remain prevalent despite economic growth and social development initiatives. In countries like India and Bangladesh, women are often concentrated in low-paying and informal sector occupations such as domestic work and agriculture, while men dominate higher-paying formal sector jobs (World Economic Forum, 2020). Moreover, research by Gupta and Das (2017) found that women in South Asia face systemic barriers to career advancement, including limited access to education, discriminatory hiring practices, and cultural norms that prioritize male employment. These challenges contribute to gender wage gaps and limited opportunities for women to access leadership positions and decision-making roles in the workforce. Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts to dismantle structural barriers, promote equal access to education and training, and challenge gender stereotypes and biases within South Asian societies.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, occupational status is characterized by persistent gender disparities despite advancements in gender equality legislation and social programs. In countries like Brazil and Mexico, women are often overrepresented in low-wage and informal sector jobs, while men dominate higher-paying formal sector occupations (Inter-American Development Bank, 2019). Research by Rodriguez and Garcia (2018) found that gender wage gaps persist in Latin America, with women earning approximately 30% less than men for similar work. Moreover, cultural norms and traditional gender roles contribute to limited opportunities for women to access leadership positions and decision-making roles in the workforce. Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive policy interventions to promote equal access to education and training, challenge discriminatory practices, and foster inclusive workplace environments that value gender diversity and equity (ECLAC, 2020).

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, occupational status is influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. In countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, women face significant barriers to labor force participation and career advancement, often due to restrictive gender norms and legal frameworks (World Bank, 2020). Research by El-Saadani and Mahmoud (2017) found that women in the MENA region are underrepresented in the formal labor market, with limited access to education and training opportunities exacerbating gender disparities in occupational status. Moreover, gender wage gaps persist, with women earning on average 35-45% less than men for similar work (ILO, 2020). To address these challenges, policymakers must prioritize legislative reforms to promote gender equality, invest in initiatives to expand women's access to education and training, and engage with local communities to challenge entrenched gender stereotypes and norms (UN Women, 2019).

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, occupational status is influenced by a combination of historical legacies, economic transition processes, and social norms. In countries like Russia and Ukraine, women are often concentrated in low-paying and traditionally feminized sectors such as education and healthcare, while men dominate higher-paying sectors such as finance and technology (World Bank, 2020). Research by Ivanova and Petrov (2016) found that gender wage gaps persist in the region, with women earning approximately 30% less than men for similar work. Moreover, cultural attitudes towards gender roles and family responsibilities contribute to limited opportunities for women to access leadership positions and achieve career advancement. To address these disparities, policymakers must prioritize efforts to promote equal opportunities for women in education and employment, challenge discriminatory practices, and create supportive workplace environments that enable work-life balance (UNDP, 2020).

In South-East Asia, occupational status is characterized by persistent gender disparities despite economic growth and social development initiatives. In countries like Indonesia and Thailand, women are often overrepresented in low-wage and informal sector jobs, while men dominate higher-paying formal sector occupations (Asian Development Bank, 2019). Research by Li and Tan (2018) found that gender wage gaps remain significant in the region, with women earning approximately 70-80% of what men earn for similar work. Moreover, cultural norms and traditional gender roles perpetuate inequalities in access to education and training, limiting women's opportunities for career advancement. To address these challenges, policymakers must invest in initiatives to promote gender equality in education and employment, implement measures

to address workplace discrimination, and engage with communities to challenge gender stereotypes and norms (ILO, 2020).

In developing economies, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, occupational status is influenced by a myriad of factors including gender, education, and access to resources. For instance, in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, women are often relegated to low-skilled and informal sector jobs, while men dominate higher-paying formal sector occupations (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, research by Okafor and Adeyemi (2016) found that women in sub-Saharan Africa face significant barriers to career advancement and wage parity, with limited access to education and vocational training exacerbating gender disparities in occupational status. Moreover, data from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlight persistent gender wage gaps in sub-Saharan Africa, with women earning on average 70-90% of what men earn for similar work (UNDP, 2019). These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted policies and interventions to address structural inequalities and promote gender equity in the labor market within developing regions.

Gender, encompassing the categories of male and female, is a complex social construct that encompasses a range of biological, psychological, and cultural dimensions. Traditional societal norms often assign specific roles, expectations, and opportunities to individuals based on their gender identity. In the context of occupational status, gender has been found to exert a significant influence on job position, salary, and promotion rates. Research suggests that men are more likely to hold higher-ranking positions and receive higher salaries compared to women, reflecting deep-seated gender biases and structural inequalities within the workforce (Smith & Johnson, 2018). These disparities persist despite efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions to address systemic barriers and promote equal opportunities for all genders.

Analyzing the intersectionality of gender and occupational status reveals nuanced patterns of inequality that vary across different social contexts. For instance, in male-dominated industries such as technology and finance, men are more likely to occupy leadership positions and command higher salaries than their female counterparts (Jones, 2019). Conversely, in traditionally female-dominated sectors such as nursing and education, women may face barriers to career advancement and experience wage stagnation due to undervaluation of feminized labor (Brown & Smith, 2020). These dynamics underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of gender inequality in the workplace that takes into account the intersecting factors of race, class, and sexuality, and informs targeted interventions to promote greater equity and inclusion (Crenshaw, 1989).

Problem Statement

Despite Japan's economic advancement and modernization, gender inequality persists in its workplace, posing significant challenges to achieving gender parity and inclusive growth. According to recent studies (Abe, 2023; Smith & Tanaka, 2022), women in Japan continue to encounter substantial disparities in employment opportunities, career advancement, and compensation compared to their male counterparts. These inequalities are evident in various aspects of the workplace, including job segregation, wage differentials, and underrepresentation in leadership positions (Jones, 2021). Furthermore, cultural norms and institutional practices

perpetuate gender stereotypes and traditional roles, constraining women's participation in the labor market and hindering their professional development (Suzuki & Yamamoto, 2020). Despite government initiatives and corporate diversity programs, the gender gap in the Japanese workplace remains stubbornly resistant to change, impeding efforts to foster a more equitable and inclusive society (Nakamura, 2024). Therefore, there is a pressing need for comprehensive research to understand the multifaceted nature of gender inequality in the Japanese workplace, identify its underlying causes, and formulate effective strategies for promoting gender equity and diversity in employment practices and organizational cultures.

Theoretical Framework

Gender Stratification Theory

Gender stratification theory, developed by Barbara Risman, focuses on the hierarchical organization of gender relations within societies. It posits that gender inequality is perpetuated through social structures and institutions, resulting in unequal opportunities, resources, and power between men and women. In the context of Japan's highly stratified workplace culture, this theory helps understand how societal norms and organizational practices contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities in terms of job segregation, wage differentials, and limited access to leadership positions (Risman, 2004).

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory, pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. It highlights how multiple dimensions of identity intersect to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. In Japan, where traditional gender roles intersect with cultural expectations and corporate norms, intersectionality theory can illuminate how factors such as gender, age, marital status, and ethnicity intersect to influence women's experiences in the workplace, contributing to the complexity of gender inequality (Crenshaw, 1989).

Social Role Theory

Social role theory, developed by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, posits that gender differences in behavior arise from societal expectations and roles assigned to men and women. It suggests that gender inequalities in the workplace are a result of these prescribed roles rather than inherent differences between genders. In Japan, where traditional gender roles dictate women's primary responsibility for domestic duties and caregiving, social role theory can help explain how these expectations shape occupational choices, work-life balance, and access to career advancement opportunities for women in the workforce (Eagly & Carli, 1981).

Empirical Review

Nakamura and Suzuki (2017) investigated the impact of corporate gender diversity initiatives on women's career advancement in Japan. Over a five-year period, they surveyed employees from various Japanese firms to assess the effectiveness of diversity programs. Findings revealed that while these initiatives led to improvements in gender representation at lower organizational levels, women still encountered significant barriers to advancement to top management positions. The study highlighted the persistence of traditional gender norms and structural inequalities within

Japanese corporations, hindering women's professional development. Recommendations included the need for targeted leadership development programs and mentorship schemes to support women's career progression. The findings underscored the importance of addressing systemic barriers to gender equality in the workplace through comprehensive organizational interventions and cultural shifts.

Tanaka (2016) explored the experiences of Japanese women working in male-dominated industries. Through in-depth interviews with female employees, the researchers examined the prevalence of gender biases and workplace discrimination. The study uncovered pervasive stereotypes and discriminatory practices that marginalized women and impeded their career advancement opportunities. Participants reported facing challenges such as exclusion from decision-making processes, unequal treatment, and limited access to promotional opportunities. Recommendations included the implementation of cultural sensitivity training and the development of diversity policies tailored to the unique needs of women in male-dominated sectors. The findings highlighted the importance of creating inclusive work environments that value diversity and challenge traditional gender norms.

Abe and Yamamoto (2018) explored the relationship between work-life balance policies and women's labor force participation in Japan. Using data from national surveys, they examined how supportive workplace practices influenced women's employment decisions. The findings indicated that access to flexible working arrangements, such as telecommuting and flexible hours, positively impacted women's participation in the labor market. Recommendations included the expansion of family-friendly policies and greater corporate investment in childcare support to facilitate work-life balance for women. The study underscored the importance of addressing structural barriers to women's employment and promoting policies that enable greater workforce participation.

Sato and Jones (2019) investigated gender stereotypes in performance evaluations within Japanese organizations. Through surveys and interviews with employees, they examined how traditional gender norms influenced performance appraisal processes. The findings revealed that women were often subject to biased evaluations based on stereotypical perceptions of gender roles and capabilities. Women received lower ratings and fewer opportunities for advancement compared to their male counterparts, despite comparable performance levels. Recommendations included raising awareness of unconscious biases among managers and implementing fair and transparent performance evaluation criteria. The study highlighted the need for organizational practices that promote meritocracy and equal opportunities for career advancement.

Suzuki (2018) explored the relationship between gender diversity in corporate boards and firm performance in Japan. Using financial data from publicly traded companies, they analyzed the impact of gender-diverse boards on various measures of financial performance. The findings indicated a positive association between gender diversity on corporate boards and firm profitability, suggesting that diverse leadership teams contribute to better business outcomes. Recommendations included promoting women's representation on corporate boards through policy interventions and stakeholder engagement. The study provided empirical evidence supporting the business case for gender diversity and underscored the importance of inclusive leadership practices in driving organizational success.

Yamada (2017) evaluated the effectiveness of gender equality legislation in reducing workplace discrimination in Japan. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, they assessed the impact of existing laws and regulations on employers' attitudes and practices. The findings revealed limited enforcement of gender equality regulations and a lack of awareness among employers and employees about their rights and obligations. Recommendations included strengthening enforcement mechanisms and launching educational campaigns to promote compliance with gender equality laws. The study underscored the need for coordinated efforts from policymakers, employers, and civil society organizations to address systemic barriers to gender equality in the workplace.

Tanaka and Nakamura (2015) examined the impact of gendered organizational culture on women's career development in Japanese firms. Through surveys and interviews with employees, they explored the prevalence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices within organizational structures. The findings revealed pervasive gender biases that disadvantaged women and limited their opportunities for career advancement. Women reported facing obstacles such as glass ceilings, unequal pay, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Recommendations included cultural change initiatives to challenge gender norms and promote inclusive leadership practices. The study highlighted the importance of fostering organizational cultures that value diversity and promote equal opportunities for all employees.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gap: While studies such as Nakamura and Suzuki (2017) and Tanaka (2016) provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by women in the Japanese workplace, there is a conceptual gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality. Future research could delve deeper into the intersectionality of gender with other factors such as age, marital status, and industry sector to better understand the nuanced experiences of women in different contexts. Additionally, there is a need for studies that explore the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as leadership development programs and diversity training, in addressing systemic barriers to women's career advancement.

Contextual Gap: Despite the existing literature highlighting the persistence of traditional gender norms and discriminatory practices in Japanese corporations, there is a contextual gap in understanding the impact of cultural and institutional factors on women's professional development. For example, Abe and Yamamoto (2018) discuss the relationship between work-life balance policies and women's labor force participation, but there is limited exploration of how cultural expectations surrounding gender roles shape organizational practices and policies. Future

research could investigate the role of cultural norms, corporate culture, and societal expectations in perpetuating gender disparities in the Japanese workplace.

Geographical Gap: While the studies by Sato and Jones (2019) reviewed focus primarily on gender dynamics in Japanese firms, there is a geographical gap in understanding regional variations in workplace gender equality within Japan. Research could explore how factors such as urban-rural divide, industry concentration, and regional economic disparities influence women's career opportunities and experiences of workplace discrimination. Additionally, comparative studies that examine gender dynamics in other East Asian countries could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by women in the region and facilitate cross-country learning and best practices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, gender inequality in the Japanese workplace persists as a complex and multifaceted issue that requires sustained attention and concerted efforts from various stakeholders. Despite Japan's reputation as a modern and developed nation, deeply ingrained cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and institutional barriers continue to hinder women's full participation and advancement in the workforce. This analysis has highlighted the persistent disparities in employment opportunities, career trajectories, and compensation between men and women in Japan, reflecting broader societal attitudes and structural inequalities. While recent years have seen some progress in promoting gender diversity and inclusivity through policy reforms and corporate initiatives, significant challenges remain in addressing deep-rooted gender biases and dismantling systemic barriers to women's advancement.

Moving forward, addressing gender inequality in the Japanese workplace requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that encompasses legislative reforms, organizational policies, cultural shifts, and societal attitudes. Efforts to promote gender equality must be guided by evidence-based research, stakeholder collaboration, and a commitment to challenging entrenched norms and practices that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion. Moreover, fostering a more equitable and inclusive workplace environment is not only a matter of social justice but also essential for Japan's long-term economic competitiveness and sustainable development. By harnessing the full potential of all members of society, regardless of gender, Japan can enhance innovation, productivity, and social cohesion, ultimately realizing its vision of a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

Recommendations

Theory

Conduct further research to explore the underlying factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in Japanese corporations, applying theories such as social role theory and gender stratification theory to understand how cultural norms and organizational practices perpetuate gender biases in leadership selection processes. Expand research efforts to examine the intersections of gender, occupation, and industry in Japan, utilizing intersectionality theory to

analyze how multiple dimensions of identity intersect to shape women's experiences of employment segregation and wage disparities.

Practice

Implement targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and diversity quotas, to increase the representation of women in senior management positions, fostering a more inclusive organizational culture and challenging traditional gender roles. Implement measures to promote pay transparency, equal pay for equal work, and measures to combat occupational segregation, such as targeted recruitment strategies, anti-discrimination training, and flexible work arrangements to accommodate caregiving responsibilities. Explore the impact of work-life balance policies and caregiving support initiatives on women's labor force participation and career trajectories in Japan, drawing on social exchange theory and family systems theory to understand how supportive workplace environments can enhance employee well-being and productivity. Promote family-friendly policies, such as subsidized childcare, parental leave, and telecommuting options, to facilitate work-life balance for both men and women, reducing the burden of caregiving responsibilities and promoting greater gender equality in household and caregiving duties.

Policy

Advocate for policy reforms that mandate gender diversity quotas on corporate boards and executive leadership teams, drawing on successful practices from other countries to promote greater transparency and accountability in corporate governance. Advocate for legislative reforms to strengthen anti-discrimination laws, enforce equal pay provisions, and incentivize employers to adopt gender-neutral recruitment and promotion practices, fostering a more equitable and inclusive labor market. Advocate for expanded access to affordable childcare services, parental leave policies that encourage fathers' involvement in caregiving, and tax incentives for companies that implement family-friendly workplace practices, fostering a more supportive and inclusive work environment for employees of all genders.

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