# Gender Bias in Corporate Leadership- A Study of Selected Pharmaceutical Industry of Gujarat

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## Introduction

The term gender bias is typically used to describe the differential treatment or evaluation of persons depending on gender, rather than actual ability, credentials or performance, in a particular work place environment. The problem, however, is historically and culturally embedded, operating terms that sustain assumptions about what men and women can or cannot do in business contexts. One is that women are more emotionally and caring than men traits; traits that are assumed to be not contained in leaders. On the other side, qualities of man are linked with contingent characteristics like being aggressive or domineering, which have to do with power and authority. From lowest to highest, salary inequities, unequal chances for promotion and harassment in the workplace are forms gender prejudice may take. Although overt sexism has become less socially acceptable, implicit prejudices and microaggressions thrive in modern organisations. And microaggressions are smaller than overt sexism. As a result, it is much harder to see and counteract these biases because they are typically unconscious. Research shows not only that gender prejudice restricts the professional growth of women and other marginalized genders, but rather that it cripples the productivity of organisations by depriving them of diverse ideas. Businesses absolutely should have it as a top priority to create an environment that is egalitarian and productive for all workers, no matter their gender. It is in this direction that it is necessary to identify and eliminate a system of prejudices, develop an inclusive culture and establish gender neutral policies (Swapna, & Pallavi, 2023).

The roots of gender prejudice in the workplace can be traced to old society institutions that assigned men as providers, and women as homemakers. This division of labor was the forerunner of such a division of labor, and it continued in the process of industrialization. In the time of the Industrial Revolution women began joining the labor in large numbers; however, they were usually restricted to positions within labor fields that were seen to be an integral part of their private obligations. The two positions they held were teaching, nursing, and secretarial work. Either these positions were underestimated or poorly rewarded, and the perception developed that women's role was lower than that of men. In the course of time, it is a historical precedent that has a bearing,

to create the norms and precedents of contemporary workplaces, and hence for the systematic gender prejudice. It is when women began entering into more professional fields that we see that they were met with hostility, and they were discriminated against in employment, promotions and salary. Even after they began to participate more, this continued. Favoring male workers — policies such as seniority, state favoring continuous work history — pushed women at home into further marginalization, particularly women looking to maintain the home and work lives. Such disparities have left indelible marks which still find their dependencies in workplace's dynamics as prejudices,explicit and unconscious, pass on to decide making. This historical backdrop that on the premise of having a well in sight of this historical backdrop, it is critical to address this issue of gender prejudice in this contemporary workplace and to arrive at a position of compliance that which subjects to be cognizant of and regard the quantities of various individuals with a fair working condition (Aderemi & Alley, 2019).

## Research Questions

1) What is the representation of women in leadership roles in the pharmaceutical industry in Gujarat?

2) What factors contribute to gender bias in corporate leadership in this sector?

3) How does gender bias affect organizational performance and employee morale?

## Literature Review

In the societies social mores based on traditional pattern, rules are conservative for rearing practices of socialization. This is called close circuit phenomenon, which includes safety measures, development of household responsibilities and treatment. In Indian context care of a females child is considered as a huge responsibilities without much of the return (Bhogle, 1981). In the economically deprived classes females are often taken out from school in order to fulfill their household responsibilities and caring of younger brothers and sisters. Females of deprived classes are often put on works of upper level class (Sundari, 2007).

Females are expected to behave according to social conformity, religious and ethnic norms consistently (Bhogle, 1991).The female and male child reared in different sex role modeling with use the tactics of reward and punishment. These practices are also influenced by caste of the family for example in Brahmin families, the females are brought up in a contained and preserved manner for the purpose of an alliance in line with their status, preferably in their own sub-caste (Dube 1988).For female child in India , the differentiation first begins at their natal home where they are born and raised , and it continues to their in laws home (Chambers, 1997), In law of Indian scripture Mannu (1886), it is said that women are never free they are dependent and protected by her father in her childhood, then in her youth she is protected by her husband and in old age by her son. It depicts the image of women in Indian society always as dependent on men for her protection.

Women's roles and boundaries are fixed and non-permeable even in the present time, although socio-economic status of Hindu society are flexible and changeable, one of the important change is women's contribution to economic resources of her family (Basu, 1983).

These theories and researches show that socialization plays very crucial role in development of gender development and gender bias, but the dimensions of socialization is not restricted only to one aspect. These can influences multiple personality constructs or variables but since we are human being and an active manipulator of the environment so our personality variable can also influence the way we perceive and experience gender bias as a person. In the present research we have focused mainly on three variables values, self-concept and cognitive styles, in order to study relationship and influence of gender bias.

A key player in shaping and nurturing an organization's culture lies with corporate leadership. Leadership at the very top of the organizational hierarchy has great influence on the way employees understand their roles and deal with one another, as shown through how leaders display their values, beliefs and behaviors. The rest of the organization characterizes accordingly when leaders model integrity and collaboration, as well as innovation. As an example, if leaders value the transparency and open communication, so should their employees and it breed the trust and belongingness at an organization. Leadership also impact organization culture because they establish clear

expectations and also define norms on holding people accountable, work ethics and work performance. Leaders who proactively establish and continue to develop a good corporate culture positively impact employee engagement, job satisfaction and long-term organization success. As a competitive advantage, a well-defined and strong culture backed up by strong leadership can help a company attract and retain the best talent. However, without strong leadership, organizational culture starts to become disjointed resulting in misalignment, low morale and poor performance (D'Agostino & Kauffman, 2022)).

One of the most widely used style of leadership in corporate world is transformational. Those leaders who adopt this approach give their followers a sense that they are motivated not to merely reach the objectives of the organization but rather another level to them, the interests of the organization, the higher good. Leadership of this kind encourages innovation, creativity and a commitment to continuous improvement. Transformational leaders help create the vision for how the company should be in the future and help employees understand that vision and believe they can contribute to making it a reality. Especially during periods of organizational change (as in mergers, restructuring or crises), it is important to foster such a leadership style. But a transformational leader can take an organization through these changes with optimism, he can create a common cause and give employees the means to create success with the change process. Transformational leadership emphasizes individual as well as organizational goals, promoting employee growth and a connectivity of the company's mission with employee aspirations. The form of leadership needed to build a resilient and agile organization that can keep up with market shifting is this (Mohamed, 2023).

Corporate leadership without ethical leadership is extremely ineffective. An unethical leader who pays scant attention to such matters will build logistical trust in the organization which leads to a short-term win. Ethical leadership is deciding things not only in the interest of the organization, but in the interest of employees, customers, shareholders and other stakeholders. Leaders show the way how business should be done, exhibiting ethical behavior that employees will feel they have some responsibility and accountability about the way they do business.

Furthermore, ethical leaders foster a culture of transparency, honesty and fairness which helps to reduce the risk if any such unethical practice like corruption or fraud damaging the organization reputation. Today, in a hyper competitive and global marketplace, consumers, investors and employees are committed to judging companies on social responsibility and ethical governance. Because of that, organizations that have effective leadership that embraces ethics are in a better position to engage with stakeholders over the long term to keep brand value high, moderate challenges and keep the public trust high. Apart from improving an organization's reputation, ethical leadership promotes an environment in an organization where employees feel respected and valued (Armour, 2023).

No leadership style fits all as the impact of leadership on organizational performance is not consistent. Autocratic, democratic, transformational and laissez fair are common forms of leadership but each has their own advantages and disadvantages. For instance, fast decision making and rapid clarity in situations where promptness is critical, may result from autocratic leadership – the decisions made are solely at the instance of a single leader without any contribution or input from subordinates. While it can also choke creativity and employee morale if overdone, it doesn't have to be. Democratic leadership encourages collaboration and consensus building as well as a more inclusive and creative work environment at the cost of decision making in a little slower speed (Abild & O'Reilly, 2010)). Earlier discussed was transformational leadership, that's about motivating and inspiring employees to do more than attend to the current tasks at hand, resulting in higher engagement and output. Laissez faire leadership which leaves much room for the employee to act without much interference is a good way in highly skilled and self-motivated team but will lead to no direction or responsibility; an uncontrolled initiative where a leader sits pretty and say hands off on things. Corporate leadership is highly dependent to the manner of how the style can be best used to realize certain circumstances and leadership strategies should be developed according to the needs of the team as well as the goals of the organization (Pireddu & Roccato, 2021)).

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender bias in corporate leadership within the pharmaceutical industry of Gujarat.

### Sample Selection

A purposive sampling technique was used to select five pharmaceutical companies in Gujarat, including both multinational corporations and local firms.

### Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was distributed among 150 employees (75 men and 75 women) across the selected companies. The questionnaire included questions on demographics, perceptions of gender bias, and experiences related to career advancement.

### Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, including chi-square tests to identify significant differences between male and female perceptions of gender bias.

## Findings and Analysis

### Table 1: Demographic Results

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 60 | 60 |
| Female | 40 | 40 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 60 | 60 |
| Female | 40 | 40 |
| **Age** | | |
| 18-25 years | 25 | 25 |
| 26-35 years | 35 | 35 |
| 36-45 years | 20 | 20 |
| 46 years and above | 20 | 20 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The demographic profile of the respondents is crucial in understanding the context of the findings. The sample consisted of 150 respondents, with a gender distribution of 60% male (60 respondents) and 40% female (40 respondents). The age distribution indicates that majority of the respondents ate below the age of 35.

### Table 2: Perceptions of Gender Bias

| Variable | Mean Score (Male) | Mean Score (Female) |
|---|---|---|
| There is a gender bias in promotions | 3.2 | 4.5 |
| Women are less likely to be considered for leadership roles | 3.5 | 4.2 |
| Male employees receive more support from management | 3.0 | 4.0 |
| Gender bias affects team dynamics | 3.8 | 4.4 |
| There are equal opportunities for men and women | 2.5 | 3.0 |

It can be observed from the above table that the female respondents tend to sense gender bias more strongly than the male counterparts. It can be seen from the mean scores that women believe there is a strong promotion and leadership bias, while men are more neutral on the same.

**Table 3: Result of Chi-Square Tests**

| Variable | Chi-Square Value | p-value | Significant Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| There is a gender bias in promotions | 15.32 | 0.0005 | Yes |
| Women are less likely to be considered for leadership roles | 10.25 | 0.0015 | Yes |
| Male employees receive more support from management | 12.40 | 0.0009 | Yes |
| Gender bias affects team dynamics | 8.75 | 0.0035 | Yes |
| There are equal opportunities for men and women | 6.50 | 0.0110 | Yes |

The chi-square tests show that the perceptions of female versus male participants regarding gender bias of all statements are significantly different from each other. The p values are both strong evidence against the null hypothesis, and that female respondents are more sensitive to gender bias.

## Discussions

The results show that gender bias in promotions was strongly perceived, with female respondents agreeing more strongly with the statement than male respondents. This is in line with the existing literature that mentions women are a kind of silenced in corporate settings, especially when it is in the fields of male dominated industries such as the pharmaceuticals. The differences in perception may come from personal opinions of or observations regarding organizational practices that advantage the male employee over the female employee.

When we conceptualize this gender bias in promotions in the pharma industry, we do not only see it as an anomaly in the industry, but rather a symptom shared by all industries. However, research points towards a correlation between the benefits of greater gender diversity within leadership roles, and organisations with more gender balanced leadership teams tend to be more profitable and innovative (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020). Finally, promoting a culture that actively encourages women's progression can result in enhanced employee loyalty and retention, because employees choose to work in a place that prioritises gender equality (Stephens et al., 2020). Companies increasingly look to differentiate themselves by achieving competitive advantage, with these biases therefore having an increasing importance for addressing both ethical as well as organizational performance and reputation in the marketplace.

In addition, this focus on diversity and inclusion can lead to better decision making processes, as diverse teams will bring a broad array of perspectives, to help with more holistic problem solving and creativity. In addition, unequal opportunities can not only obtrude on a person's professional experience, but also may negatively influence the performance of the organization as a whole. Take for example, research has demonstrated that companies that focus on gender diversity in leadership are more financially successful: organizations in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 25% more profitable than organizations in the bottom quartile (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020). This appears to suggest there is a correlation between having an inclusive workspace and better business outcomes (driven by leveraging the diversity of perspectives coming into strategic decision making). Therefore, organizations operating within the pharmaceutical sector, and indeed within any other sector, must carry out aggressive diversity initiatives characterized by actions that break down bias and provide equal opportunities to advance, leading to a more volatile and innovative workforce.

## Conclusions

The gender bias in corporate leadership is analyzed in the selected pharmaceutical industry of Gujarat to understand the gender disparity between male as well as female leaders. We have made strides in gender equality, but women still face systemic barriers that prevent them from aspiring into leadership roles. They live on, though their findings point to the underrepresentation of women in leadership being due to cultural sterotypes, organizational

struture and biases in recruitment and promotion practices.

Additionally, the research demonstrates the need for an inclusive corporate culture that cherishes diversity, and offers equal working opportunities to every employee. Organizations which practice gender sensitivity in their policies and practices not only have more of their leaders come from among women but also draw the rich benefits of diverse thinking, processes and performances as a result.

Finally, tackling gender bias in pharmaceutical corporate leadership is critical for the pharmaceutical industry in Gujarat, not only for optics, but also as a company strategy. Initiatives to develop women into leaders, to break current biases and to create an equitable environment that allows all individuals to achieve their full potential must be elevated as a priority by key stakeholders. This will allow the industry to chart a course towards a more balanced and functional leadership ecosystem that mirrors the variety of the society served.

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