Research Paper

Gender Pay Gap and Workplace Equality: Analyzing Progress and Setbacks

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Abstract: This study explores the persistent issue of gender pay disparity and workplace inequality in India by employing a quantitative, closed-ended survey method. With a structured questionnaire administered to 600 full-time employees across five major sectors—of which 384 valid responses were analyzed—the study aims to quantify gender-based wage disparities, examine perceptions of workplace fairness, identify structural barriers, and evaluate the awareness and effectiveness of legal and organizational redressal mechanisms. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across gender, sector, and job levels, while SPSS-based statistical analyses revealed pronounced perceptions of wage inequality, particularly among female respondents. The findings indicate that organizational pay transparency is limited, promotions are not widely perceived to be merit-based, and cultural norms continue to restrict women's career advancement. Legal awareness is low, with only a third of respondents considering existing redressal mechanisms effective. Sectoral disparities were notable, with education and healthcare exhibiting higher perceived inequality than IT or retail. The study contributes significantly to the literature by offering first-hand, employee-level insights often absent in macroeconomic analyses. Its findings underscore the urgent need for intersectional and targeted policy interventions, enhanced enforcement mechanisms, and greater organizational commitment to gender equity. This research bridges a critical gap in the Indian gender equality discourse by aligning perceptual data with policy assessment and practice.

Keywords: Gender Pay Gap, Workplace Equality, India, Wage Disparity, Organizational Policy, Employee Perception

I.   Introduction

The persistence of gender-based wage disparity represents a critical impediment to achieving workplace equality across the globe. Despite decades of policy reforms and awareness campaigns, wage inequality between men and women continues to prevail, particularly in emerging economies like India. The issue is not merely economic but intersects deeply with social justice, equality of opportunity, and sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which emphasizes achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), India's gender pay gap stands among the highest in the Asia-Pacific region, hovering around 30%, a figure that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade (Sengupta & Puri, 2022).

In India, the gender pay gap is symptomatic of multiple structural inequalities. Women are underrepresented in high-paying industries and overrepresented in informal or low-skilled sectors, often with limited labor protections. In an analytical study conducted by Singh and Pattanaik (2020), evidence was presented that female workers from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) earn significantly less even when controlling for educational background, pointing to the compounded effects of gender and caste-based discrimination. These systemic disparities remain deeply entrenched despite legislative measures like the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and the more recent Code on Wages, 2019. Urban employment statistics mirror the same trend. Ara (2021) found that within urban labor markets, the gender wage differential can be as high as 24%, with women being more susceptible to low-wage informal jobs and limited mobility. Furthermore, Mondal et al. (2018) indicate that women's labor force participation has declined from 35% in 1993-94 to just over 20% in recent years, despite rising literacy and qualifications. This paradox is compounded by inadequate childcare support, workplace harassment, glass ceilings, and traditional gender norms.

Although a rich body of literature exists on gender inequality, wage disparity, and labor market participation, most of these studies are either qualitative or rely on secondary macro-level datasets such as the NSSO, PLFS, or Census data. For example, Rustagi (2005) analyzed income inequalities using NSS data, and while informative, her work lacked primary insights into workplace attitudes and employee experiences.

Similarly, Lama and Majumder (2018) utilized Employment and Unemployment Surveys to study labor segmentation and wage discrimination, but did not explore how workers perceive such inequality in organizational settings. Another notable gap is the dearth of industry-specific or region-specific survey studies in India that employ closed-ended quantitative instruments to collect data directly from working professionals. Studies like Chakraborty (2020) and Kumar and Rao (2021) have either focused on public-private wage differentials or broad legal frameworks, without adequately exploring the operational manifestations of these gaps in workplaces through empirical survey design. This research attempts to fill that methodological void by collecting first-hand data via a structured questionnaire and analyzing it quantitatively.

Despite increasing awareness and policy-level commitment toward gender equality, India continues to witness a substantial pay gap between male and female employees, particularly in private sectors and managerial roles. The absence of comprehensive, survey-based research that directly examines employee perceptions, sectoral differences, and the interplay of gender with workplace hierarchies leaves a critical void in understanding the dynamics of this issue. This study addresses that gap by conducting a detailed quantitative survey to explore the extent, causes, and perceived consequences of the gender pay gap in Indian workplaces.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the current state of gender pay inequality in India, based on employee perspectives from various sectors and hierarchical positions. To achieve this, the study is guided by the following research objectives:

1.   To quantify gender-based wage disparities across industries and roles.
2.   To examine employee perceptions of workplace equality, career progression, and pay transparency.
3.   To identify factors contributing to the persistence of wage inequality.
4.   To evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and organizational mechanisms in mitigating wage disparities.

The study employs a structured, closed-ended survey approach with a final sample size of 600, collected through stratified sampling, achieving a 64% response rate.

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways. Firstly, it provides a rare, survey-based empirical investigation into the gender pay gap in India, offering insights grounded in employee experiences rather than solely relying on macroeconomic data. Secondly, it bridges the gap between policy and practice by juxtaposing legal mandates with actual perceptions and reported workplace realities. Thirdly, it supports the discourse on intersectionality by acknowledging and exploring how caste, marital status, education, and geography may compound wage-based discrimination. Moreover, the study has practical implications for both corporate governance and public policy. For organizations, the findings offer evidence-based guidance on promoting equitable compensation structures, inclusive HR practices, and improved workplace culture. For policymakers, it highlights gaps in enforcement and policy design, pointing to areas where interventions may be urgently required. Ultimately, the research contributes to a broader understanding of gender-based workplace inequality in India and calls for a data-driven, actionable framework to address this systemic issue.

II.   Literature Review

This section organizes and critically analyzes prior studies on the gender pay gap and workplace inequality in India, structured thematically to align with our research objectives: wage disparity quantification, perceptions of workplace fairness, structural contributors to inequality, and legal effectiveness.

Quantitative Estimation of the Gender Wage Gap
A significant body of literature has addressed wage disparities using various datasets. **Poddar and Mukhopadhyay (2019)** employed nationally representative NSSO data to highlight that the gender wage gap is not only wide but has shown limited improvement over two decades. Their regression models reveal persistent disparities even after controlling for education and experience, particularly in urban India (Poddar & Mukhopadhyay, 2019).

Kumar and Pandey (2021) conducted a decomposition analysis using the Blinder–Oaxaca method to differentiate explained and unexplained wage gaps between formal and informal workers. Their findings indicated that nearly 60% of the total wage gap is due to unexplained factors, hinting at structural or discriminatory causes (Kumar & Pandey, 2021).

In rural settings, **Pattayat and Parida (2023)** focused on non-farm employment and reported that women earn up to 32% less than men despite similar qualifications. Their work used nationally representative datasets and regression-based decomposition to reveal occupational clustering and limited access to skill development as major drivers of the pay gap (Pattayat & Parida, 2023).

Social and Structural Determinants of Inequality
Das (2012) offered a decomposition by sector and activity status, identifying gender as one of the strongest variables explaining wage differentials. His study utilized the 61st NSS round and found that sectoral segregation—especially concentration of women in low-paying jobs—significantly influences income disparities (Das, 2012).

Rustagi (2005) similarly pointed to occupational segregation and cultural norms as core causes of wage differences. Drawing from both NSS data and field survey experiences, her analysis noted that women often self-select or are guided toward "acceptable" roles, which tend to be underpaid (Rustagi, 2005).

Singh (2017) added a dimension of caste-based inequality. His study showed that Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women faced an additional penalty, earning significantly less than upper-caste women with the same qualifications, due to dual discrimination (Singh, 2017).

Legal and Policy Perspectives

Lama and Majumder (2018) explored the impact of legislative frameworks on narrowing the wage gap. Despite laws such as the Equal Remuneration Act, the study found poor enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. It emphasized the gap between policy intent and workplace reality, suggesting a need for stricter compliance regimes (Lama & Majumder, 2018).

Chakraborty (2020) examined wage differentials in public vs. private sectors, identifying that the private sector exhibited a larger unexplained wage gap, partly due to weaker implementation of regulatory oversight. Using PLFS and NSS-EUS data, the paper provided strong evidence for more active state intervention in private employment (Chakraborty, 2020).

Multidimensional Inequality and Employee Perceptions

Pandoh and Singh (2025) used the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) waves to construct a multidimensional wage inequality framework. Their study is one of the few to investigate intra-group inequality among women, finding that factors such as household wealth, region, and spousal education greatly affected income levels. They argued for intersectional policy approaches beyond gender (Pandoh & Singh, 2025).

Lee and Wie (2017) provided a comparative lens between China and India and emphasized how India's wage inequality, particularly for skilled workers, has worsened due to rapid but uneven economic growth. Their findings highlighted the international relevance and the importance of human capital enhancement in narrowing the gender pay gap (Lee & Wie, 2017).

Although significant research exists on the gender wage gap in India, most studies rely on secondary datasets and macro-level trends. Very few have explored how employees themselves perceive pay disparity, fairness in promotions, and transparency in wage structures. Moreover, sector-specific or position-specific analyses using primary, closed-ended survey instruments remain largely absent. This study aims to bridge that gap by capturing firsthand perspectives from a diverse working population in India. Doing so will not only validate or challenge existing empirical assumptions but will also provide actionable insights for organizational policy and government regulation.

III.   Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional research design using a quantitative approach. To align with the identified literature gap, the methodology focused on collecting primary data directly from working professionals across various sectors in India. The core aim was to capture lived employee experiences and perceptions regarding wage disparity and workplace equality, thereby providing empirical evidence often absent from macro-level or secondary dataset-based studies.

A structured, closed-ended questionnaire was employed as the primary instrument for data collection. The survey was administered digitally using Google Forms and distributed via email and professional social networks (LinkedIn and industry-specific WhatsApp groups). The questionnaire included Likert-scale items to ensure ease of response and facilitate quantifiable analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained, and all responses remained anonymous.

3.2. Sampling and Sample Size

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representativeness across different industry sectors and employee levels. The population was stratified into three categories: public sector employees, private sector employees, and employees in multinational corporations (MNCs). Further, hierarchical diversity was achieved by including junior, mid-level, and senior employees.

Out of 600 distributed questionnaires, 384 valid responses were received, yielding a response rate of 64%. This sample size met the statistical requirements for 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, making the dataset reliable for inferential analysis.

3.3. Scope of the Study

The geographical scope was pan-India, including respondents from urban centers such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kolkata. The sectors covered included IT and software services, banking and finance, education, retail, and healthcare. Only full-time employees with a minimum of one year of work experience were included in the final sample.

The thematic scope was limited to four core domains:
1. Wage disparity across roles and sectors.
2. Perceptions of fairness in workplace opportunities and compensation.
3. Structural barriers to wage equality.
4. Effectiveness of legal and organizational interventions.

3.4. Instrument Development
The questionnaire was divided into five sections:
1. **Demographics** – gender, age, educational qualification, experience, income bracket, sector, and job role.
2. **Wage Disparity Perception** – 5-point Likert scale items assessing perceived salary differences between male and female employees.
3. **Workplace Equality Experience** – statements measuring perceived fairness in promotions, opportunities, and management treatment.
4. **Structural Barriers** – items assessing cultural, policy, and organizational challenges contributing to wage inequality.
5. **Legal and Organizational Mechanism Awareness** – measuring the perceived effectiveness of wage-related policies and redressal systems.

The tool underwent a pilot test (n = 30) to ensure clarity and reliability, after which minor wording adjustments were made. Cronbach's Alpha for the overall instrument was found to be 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.

3.5. Data Source and Collection Parameters
The following table outlines all specific details regarding the data source:

Parameter	Details
Data Source	Primary data through a self-administered digital questionnaire
Population	Full-time employees across five key sectors in urban India
Sampling Technique	Stratified random sampling
Sample Size	600 (384 valid responses analyzed)
Response Rate	64%
Geographic Scope	Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata
Sectors Covered	IT, Banking & Finance, Education, Retail, Healthcare
Job Levels Included	Junior staff, Mid-level managers, Senior executives
Eligibility Criteria	Full-time employees with at least 1 year of experience
Instrument Type	Structured, closed-ended questionnaire with Likert scale items
Data Collection Period	January to March 2025
Pilot Testing Sample	30 respondents
Instrument Reliability (α)	0.82 (Cronbach's Alpha)

3.6. Data Analysis Technique
The data collected was analyzed using **descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation analysis** in IBM SPSS v26. This analytical approach enabled quantification of response patterns, examination of trends, and correlation between variables such as gender, sector, job level, and perception of wage fairness. Mean scores, frequency distributions, and standard deviations were calculated for each construct. Cross-tabulations were used to explore associations between categorical variables (e.g., gender vs. perception of pay equality).

This method was chosen for its clarity, applicability to Likert-scale data, and ability to derive interpretable and actionable results without the complexity of advanced econometric modeling. The use of SPSS ensured statistical rigor, while cross-tabulation allowed sector-wise and hierarchy-wise comparison essential for meeting research objectives.

3.7. Ethical Considerations
All participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personal identifiers were collected. Consent was obtained electronically before questionnaire initiation. The research adhered to the ethical standards outlined by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for primary data collection.

IV.   Results and Analysis
This section presents the results obtained from analyzing the 384 valid responses collected through the structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) and cross-tabulations were performed using IBM SPSS v26. The findings are presented in tabular form across key domains: demographics, wage disparity perceptions, workplace equality experiences, structural barriers, and legal/organizational mechanism awareness.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 384)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	211	54.9%
	Female	173	45.1%
Age	21–30 years	144	37.5%
	31–40 years	158	41.1%
	41–50 years	58	15.1%
	51+ years	24	6.3%
Education	Graduate	179	46.6%
	Postgraduate	152	39.6%
	Doctorate/Professional	53	13.8%
Sector	IT & Software	98	25.5%
	Banking & Finance	91	23.7%
	Education	76	19.8%
	Retail	62	16.1%
	Healthcare	57	14.8%
Job Role	Junior	158	41.1%
	Mid-level	141	36.7%
	Senior	85	22.1%

Interpretation:

The demographic data shows a relatively balanced gender distribution with 54.9% male and 45.1% female respondents. Most participants were between 31–40 years of age, representing mid-career professionals. Education levels were high, with over 86% holding graduate or postgraduate degrees. The largest representation came from IT, followed by banking and education sectors. Job role data reveals a majority of junior and mid-level employees, offering insight into employee-level experiences with wage disparities and workplace equality.

Table 2: Perceptions of Gender-Based Wage Disparity

Item Statement	Mean	SD
"Men and women are paid equally for the same role."	2.43	1.12
"Women must work harder to get the same raise as men."	4.01	0.91
"I have observed salary differences between male and female colleagues in similar positions."	3.78	1.03
"My organization maintains pay transparency."	2.65	1.04

Interpretation:

The mean responses show strong perceptions of wage disparity. Most respondents disagreed that men and women are paid equally (M = 2.43), while a high mean score (M = 4.01) supports the belief that women must work harder for equal rewards. Observational claims of unequal pay had a high mean of 3.78, suggesting lived experiences back these views. Transparency received a low mean, revealing organizational opacity in compensation structures—a key contributor to inequality.

Table 3: Perceptions of Workplace Equality and Promotion Fairness

Item Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Promotions are based solely on merit, not gender.	42 (10.9%)	97 (25.3%)	84 (21.9%)	105 (27.3%)	56 (14.6%)
Leadership roles are equally accessible to all genders.	39 (10.2%)	88 (22.9%)	102 (26.6%)	96 (25.0%)	59 (15.4%)

Interpretation:

The distribution reveals mixed perceptions on meritocracy and equal access to leadership. Only 36.2% agreed that promotions were purely merit-based, while 41.9% disagreed. Similarly, less than 33% believed leadership roles were equally accessible, while 40.4% disagreed. These results suggest skepticism toward internal fairness mechanisms and raise questions about the inclusivity of career advancement processes.

Table 4: Structural and Cultural Barriers to Equality

Barrier Identified	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Gender stereotypes influence hiring decisions.	72.1%	27.9%
Lack of childcare/family leave hinders women.	68.5%	31.5%
Male-dominated leadership reinforces bias.	75.8%	24.2%
Cultural norms prevent women from negotiating salaries.	63.3%	36.7%

Interpretation:

A large majority of respondents identified systemic and cultural challenges that perpetuate inequality. Over 72% agreed that hiring decisions are shaped by stereotypes, and 75.8% acknowledged male-dominated leadership as a key barrier. Gendered expectations around salary negotiation and childcare responsibilities also emerged as substantial obstacles. These findings underscore the social embeddedness of pay gaps, beyond individual or organizational factors alone.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation – Gender vs. Perception of Equal Pay

Gender	Agree that pay is equal (%)	Disagree (%)
Male	51 (24.2%)	160 (75.8%)
Female	19 (11.0%)	154 (89.0%)

Interpretation:

Female respondents overwhelmingly disagreed with the notion of equal pay (89%), compared to 75.8% of males. This indicates a more acute perception of discrimination among women, possibly due to direct experience. These perceptual gaps by gender suggest that policies on wage equality are not experienced uniformly across demographics and may require differentiated approaches for effective redressal.

Table 6: Sector-wise Mean Scores on Wage Disparity Perception

Sector	Mean Score (Likert Scale)
IT & Software	3.42
Banking & Finance	3.58
Education	3.81
Retail	3.35
Healthcare	3.76

Interpretation:

The education and healthcare sectors scored the highest on perceived wage disparity (3.81 and 3.76 respectively), suggesting these traditionally "female-heavy" sectors are still viewed as gender-biased in compensation. In contrast, retail and IT reported relatively lower but still substantial perceptions. These variations reflect sectoral cultures and historical patterns of female participation and valuation.

Table 7: Awareness of Legal and Organizational Policies

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Aware of Equal Remuneration Act or Wage Code 2019	41.7%	58.3%
Aware of organizational grievance redressal mechanisms	54.4%	45.6%
Believe these mechanisms are effective in resolving issues	32.6%	67.4%

Interpretation:

Less than half the respondents were aware of key legal provisions related to equal pay. Among those who knew of internal redressal systems, only 32.6% believed them to be effective. This lack of awareness and perceived ineffectiveness severely limits policy impact and explains continued dissatisfaction with workplace equality outcomes.

V. Discussion

5.1. Demographic Representation and the Contextual Landscape

The demographic analysis revealed a gender-balanced sample and strong educational qualifications among respondents, enhancing the reliability and diversity of the dataset. This mix enabled an in-depth understanding of employee perspectives across job hierarchies and industry types—something rarely captured in existing research that relies heavily on NSSO and IHDS data (Poddar & Mukhopadhyay, 2019; Pandoh & Singh, 2025). By moving beyond macroeconomic datasets to capture individual experiences, this study has directly addressed the literature gap identified in Section 2.2.

The predominance of junior and mid-level employees among respondents is significant, as this group often lacks access to wage negotiation power or leadership influence. Their perspectives are particularly valuable because their experiences are more likely to reflect the operational realities of wage setting rather than policy rhetoric.

5.2. Strong Perceptions of Wage Disparity and Lack of Transparency

Findings related to gender-based wage disparity were striking. Most respondents disagreed with the statement that men and women are paid equally, with the mean score of 2.43 strongly suggesting perceived inequality. This aligns with earlier research by Kumar and Pandey (2021), who found that over 60% of the wage gap in India is unexplained and potentially due to discrimination. The mean score of 4.01 on the belief that women must work harder for equal recognition reflects a deeply internalized experience of structural inequality. Such findings echo Rustagi's (2005) assertion that deeply embedded patriarchal attitudes remain persistent even in modern employment settings.

Moreover, the low mean score of 2.65 on organizational pay transparency supports conclusions drawn by Chakraborty (2020) about the opacity of private sector wage structures. Transparency is a cornerstone of equitable compensation practices, and its absence hinders accountability, thereby allowing gender bias to persist unchecked.

5.3. Inaccessibility to Leadership and Promotion Disparities

Only 36.2% of respondents believed promotions were based solely on merit, with nearly 42% actively disagreeing. This statistic mirrors the skepticism highlighted in Singh's (2017) study, which noted dual disadvantages faced by women, especially from marginalized backgrounds, in ascending organizational ladders.

Further, just 33.1% believed leadership roles were equally accessible to all genders. This echoes findings by Lama and Majumder (2018), who stressed that mere availability of leadership opportunities does not guarantee equitable access due to entrenched gender stereotypes and informal exclusionary networks. The disparity in perceptions related to meritocracy and leadership access demonstrates that workplace equality remains aspirational rather than actualized for many professionals in India.

5.4. Systemic and Cultural Barriers as Perceived by Employees

Respondents overwhelmingly identified gender stereotypes (72.1%) and male-dominated leadership (75.8%) as significant barriers to equality. These results are in agreement with Pandoh and Singh's (2025) multidimensional inequality framework, which emphasized the interplay of social norms and economic opportunity. Similarly, the 68.5% who agreed that lack of childcare support hinders female participation reinforced earlier observations by Das (2012) and Rustagi (2005) on the "second shift" women perform in balancing unpaid caregiving and professional obligations.

The acknowledgment of cultural expectations around salary negotiation (63.3%) suggests the persistence of gendered behavioral conditioning in professional spaces. These perceptions are rarely captured in large-scale surveys, indicating the added value of our primary data collection method. By quantifying these insights, the current study fills the identified methodological and perceptual void in the literature.

5.5. Gendered Perceptions and Sectoral Variations

The cross-tabulation between gender and perception of equal pay was revealing. While 75.8% of male respondents disagreed that pay was equal, this figure jumped to 89% for women, confirming a sharper perception gap among female professionals. This supports earlier qualitative findings by Singh and Pattanaik (2020), who highlighted that gender-based discrimination is often more visible to those directly affected by it.

Sectoral variation in perception of pay disparity further reinforces arguments made by Pattayat and Parida (2023) regarding the heightened inequality in non-farm rural and traditionally female-dominated sectors. In our data, education and healthcare—both sectors with high female participation—recorded the highest perceived inequality scores (3.81 and 3.76 respectively). This indicates not only an underappreciation of "care" work but also possibly weaker policy enforcement in these domains.

In contrast, the IT and retail sectors reported lower but still concerning scores, suggesting that modernization and urbanization alone do not resolve wage inequality unless accompanied by systemic organizational changes. These findings enrich the literature by providing sector-wise perceptual data rarely addressed in existing NSSO or IHDS-based analyses.

5.6. Awareness and Effectiveness of Legal and Organizational Mechanisms

A critical insight emerged from Table 7, where only 41.7% of respondents were aware of laws like the Equal Remuneration Act or the Wage Code 2019. Even fewer (32.6%) believed organizational mechanisms were effective in resolving related issues. These findings substantiate Chakraborty's (2020) critique that policy awareness and enforcement are minimal, especially in private sectors.

What distinguishes this study, however, is its ability to tie these perceptions directly to workplace experiences, thereby offering a more human-centered critique of institutional inefficacy. The fact that a majority of participants either had no awareness of or no confidence in legal frameworks signals a pressing need for both policy outreach and organizational training on rights-based employment structures.

5.7. Contribution to Literature and Filling the Gap

This research offers several contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First, it directly responds to the literature gap outlined in Section 2.2 by using a primary, closed-ended survey to capture employee-level perceptions—an area underrepresented in prior research. Second, it moves beyond income differentials to analyze fairness in promotion, structural barriers, and policy awareness, thereby providing a multi-dimensional perspective on workplace inequality. Third, the sector-wise and role-wise segmentation allows for granular insights that can inform more targeted policy interventions.

Importantly, this study complements large-scale secondary datasets by validating and sometimes contradicting their trends through lived experiences. For instance, while NSSO data might show nominal wage parity, the perceived inequities reported here suggest that deeper issues such as informal bias, lack of transparency, and social norms continue to obstruct real equality.

5.8. Implications for Policy and Practice

The study has wide-ranging implications for both policymakers and organizational leaders. The evident lack of awareness and belief in legal mechanisms necessitates nationwide campaigns and internal training modules that educate employees on their rights and procedures for grievance redressal. Organizations must prioritize pay audits, enhance transparency in compensation structures, and institutionalize gender-sensitive HR practices.

From a policy standpoint, enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened through digital wage tracking and anonymous reporting channels. Additionally, promoting flexible work hours, parental leave for all genders, and mentoring programs for women in leadership can address some of the structural barriers identified.

Finally, the results indicate that any real change must be intersectional—addressing not only gender but also caste, class, and sectoral location. Such an approach would mirror the complex realities of Indian workplaces and help create more inclusive systems.

VI.   Conclusion

This study has contributed a timely and empirically grounded perspective on the persistent issue of gender pay inequality and workplace inequality in India. By employing a structured, closed-ended questionnaire and gathering responses from a diverse and stratified sample of employees across key sectors, this research offers a rare insight into how gender-based disparities are experienced and perceived at the organizational level. The findings reveal that wage inequality is not merely a statistical or macroeconomic artifact but a lived and internalized experience for a significant portion of the workforce. A majority of respondents, especially women, reported dissatisfaction with compensation fairness, limited access to leadership, and skepticism toward the effectiveness of organizational redressal systems. These results underscore that the promise of legal frameworks and equal opportunity policies often fails to translate into actual workplace experiences.

One of the most significant takeaways from this study is the disconnect between policy awareness and employee perception. Although legislative instruments like the Equal Remuneration Act and the Wage Code 2019 exist, awareness among employees remains low, and belief in their efficacy even lower. This suggests a critical gap in both communication and enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, the perceptual gap between male and female respondents regarding pay equality points to the importance of gender-sensitive training and dialogue within organizations. The sector-wise analysis also revealed that traditionally female-dominated sectors such as education and healthcare continue to report higher perceived inequality, reinforcing the need for more targeted interventions in these fields.

In broader terms, the study highlights the importance of integrating employee perspectives into academic and policy discourses on gender equality. Most prior studies have relied on macro-level data that may not fully capture the nuanced barriers employees face daily. By shifting the focus to perceptual and experiential data, this study offers a human-centered complement to existing economic and statistical analyses. It also reaffirms the need for intersectional frameworks that consider not just gender but also job role, sector, and socioeconomic background in addressing inequality.

Looking forward, there is substantial scope for further research. Longitudinal studies could track changes in perceptions over time to evaluate the effectiveness of newly implemented wage policies or corporate equality initiatives. Comparative studies across rural and urban regions, as well as among different cultural contexts within India, would also enrich the understanding of how regional dynamics influence workplace equality. Moreover, incorporating qualitative insights through interviews or focus groups could deepen the understanding of how these perceptions are formed and reinforced.

In conclusion, while India has made legislative progress toward achieving gender pay equity, the findings of this study suggest that systemic and perceptual challenges continue to undermine real progress. Bridging the gap between law and lived experience will require concerted efforts from both policymakers and organizational leaders. Only through a combination of awareness, enforcement, cultural change, and structural reform can the ideals of workplace equality move from aspiration to reality.

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